

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE-MORQUE

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ISSUE **139** NOVEMBER 2013 CAN/US \$9.95



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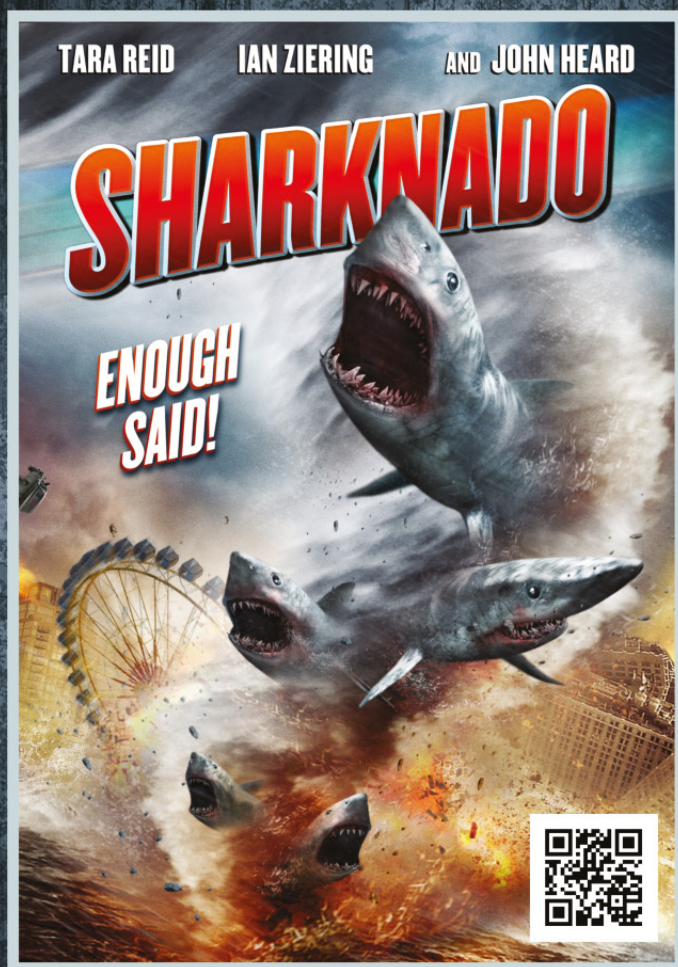
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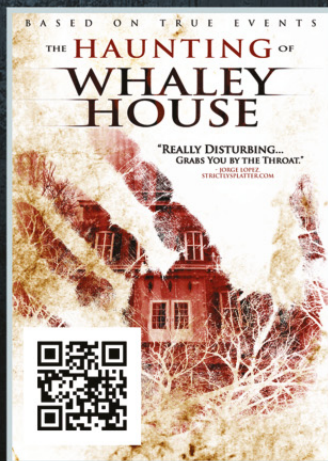
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16 UNCLEAN SPIRITS

Only the most debauched of the devout stand between a Norse demon-god and the apocalypse in J.T. Petty's *Hellbenders*. Do you know where that rosary's been? **PLUS:** Sergio Stivaletti explains why his ambitious effects for *Demons* and its sequel were a game changer in Italian horror cinema, and more!

by **APRIL SNELLINGS**, **DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ** and **MOANER T. LAWRENCE**

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by **LAST CHANCE LANCE** and **DAVE ALEXANDER**

20 biff 2013

Midnight Madness, the genre junkie portion of the Toronto International Film Festival, turned 25 this year, we give you a sneak peek at both the horror titles that premiered there, and the other global terrors unleashed.

by **DAVE ALEXANDER**, **STUART F. ANDREWS**, **PHIL BROWN**, **MONICA S. KUEBLER**, **LIISA LADOUCEUR**, **SEAN PLUMMER** and **TAL ZIMMERMAN**

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Rob Kuhn's *Birth of the Living Dead* documentary traces the explosion of zombie culture back to its Romero roots.

by **TAL ZIMMERMAN**

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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND



By the time you read this, your jack-o'-lantern is probably already getting that zombie pucker, but as I write this, we're just ramping up to the best day of the year. Excitement is building over the dozens of upcoming horror movie screenings and other Halloweenish events, I'm stressing over who (or what) I'm gonna dress up as for our annual party, and stores are full of all that spooky plastic crap that's so hard to resist.

Sadly, it also means annual news stories about schools burying their Halloween celebrations. This week the *Welland Tribune*, a small-town Ontario news outlet, ran a piece titled "Halloween cancelled at school," which describes how one of the local schools cancelled the planned Halloween dance and told parents that their children were not to dress up but instead could wear black and orange to observe "Spirit Day."

Take a moment... to let your anger subside...

The stupidity of this doesn't require explaining (though, note the cruel irony of encouraging kids to wear prison jumpsuit colours that remind them they're not allowed to join in the fun), and the announcement has caused outrage among some of the school's parents, some of whom subsequently planned a Halloween costume parade outside the school in order to give their kids some sort of communal experience. Good on 'em.

Several teacher friends of mine have lamented just how batshit terrified schools are of getting sued, so they bend to the whims of the few at the expense of the many. That's certainly not an acceptable reason to cancel any holiday-type celebration at a public school. Have religious or cultural differences? Respect the customs of the country you are in or pull your child out of school that day. Don't think children should be having all that candy? Try some healthy treats (though I still maintain that there's Circle of Hell reserved for anyone who gives out raisins on Halloween). Worry that some kids will feel excluded because they can't afford a costume? Bullshit! Some of my favourite preteen ghouls getups were scavenged from old clothes and my mom's makeup. If you can't throw together a zombie or toilet paper mummy costume, you're not trying.

But it's not just that the arguments for cancelling Halloween don't wash, it's also that the reasons for preserving it are vital. An article in *Psychology Today*, titled "The Need for Pretend Play in Child Development," is practically a laundry list of well-researched examples of how role-playing is key to childhood development. The piece ends with, "Perhaps the idea of a built-in 'pretend play recess' during the regular school day – where children can get together and explore an infinite amount of possible combinations of ideas, emotions and perspectives – will one day be just as acceptable as traditional, but no less important, forms for recess and play."

Halloween exemplifies that to me. As adults we dress up for fun, to fit in at the party, maybe win a prize or, for many, to make their own children happy. However, when I was a tyke, I recall feeling that I was actually becoming the character whose guise I'd assumed. Whether it was stalking and talking like Dracula through those drool-slicked fake fangs or protecting my class from imaginary spirits in my saggy Ghostbusters outfit, in my mind's eye, I was that monster or hero... or monster hero. I also learned what other kids desired (how many of you dressed up like a superhero, hoping you could one day be one?) and felt powerful in my armour of makeup and weirdo clothes.

Halloween provides kids the opportunity to confront what scares them. We often talk about how teens and adults consume horror fiction as a way to grapple with their fears in a safe forum. For kids, Halloween is the first opportunity to meet their monsters and diffuse the boogeymen that keep them up at night. The creature's not so frightening once you walk a mile in his fangs. And for some kids this opportunity to role play means so much more.

Decades ago at my elementary school there were classes of severely handicapped kids who the non-handicapped classes would regularly interact with. At Halloween, one of the particularly spastic, wheelchair-bound students came in a homemade Mr. T costume. All the kids thought it was really cool and he obviously agreed, as he was grinning from ear to ear. For that day, he was defined by something other than his limitations. Halloween offered him a rare and beautiful opportunity to be looked at for a reason other than that he was the aphoried boy in the wheelchair who struggled to talk and keep his head up.

The current generation of children growing up in the so-called Global Village need to be more equipped to deal with and live with differences than any generation before it. A teacher, school administrator or parent who would seek to deny them one of the more valuable opportunities to prepare for that reality is failing in his or her duties. At the very least, they've forgotten what it's like to be kid on that most wonderful day of the year.

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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



ROCK ON @GhoulshGary and @RueMorgue for featuring Pumpkinrot in the October issue of *Rue Morgue*. Glad to see him get his due!

@CHADSAVAGE, VIA TWITTER

THE LONG WAIT for @RueMorgue October issue to arrive at the local bookshop is agonizing.

@THATKATHMASSIER, VIA TWITTER

EVEN WHEN YOU DO an article on a movie I don't like, in this case *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (I hate remakes for the most part), the article is still great. Question: Stiff as Art Hindle is, how'd they know he was a pod person? In Sick Top Six, I'd like to have seen Corman's *Not Like Us*. Now that's some weird body snatching! Another great issue!

ROB MORGANBESSER – STATEN ISLAND, NY



ONCE AGAIN, I purchased a CD (#TheHaxanCloak) because @RueMorgue steered me to it. Simply: I am a horror beast. *Rue Morgue* feeds me.

@MRHORRORPANTS, VIA TWITTER

WE HAVE A @RueMorgue crush! We promise to not be Hannibal to your Clarice. Did we mention we would love to have you for dinner?

@NECROMANCERS666, VIA TWITTER

BEEN A WHILE since we had a classic universal article from you. Getting jaded with all the modern horror coverage.

@CELESTTESKATES, VIA TWITTER

WELL, I GUESS the British did beat us to the punch with shock rock after all. I never knew about [Screaming Lord Sutch] until this post from Rue Morgue! Thanks for introducing me to this guy, *Rue Morgue*, this dude is awesome!

VINCENT JONES, VIA FACEBOOK

WHENEVER I'M DRAGGING and require a break because Calgon will not take me away: *Rue Morgue*!

RICHARD CARDINAL, VIA FACEBOOK

TO BOWEN: Nice review of *Ants* and *Candy Snatchers*. Ya wanna know where they can film the *Ants* sequel, if they ever choose to? Right where I live, in Georgia; it's the start of fall, it's already starting to get cold and there are red ant hills all over the place! Heck of a thing, eh?

JOSEPH DZENCELOWCZ, VIA FACEBOOK

BRINGING MY @RueMorgue magazine to my film lecture... shhhh it totally counts as learning

@SHANNONSAZOMBIE, VIA TWITTER

I'M EMBARRASSED TO ADMIT I just noticed the absence of Travelogue of Terror. When was it last included? I'll probably feel even worse if someone says, "Oh, about twenty issues ago." I've missed a few, alright!

NATE FANCHER, VIA FACEBOOK

[Actually, it's been exactly twenty issues! We still run travel-themed features, however. – Ed.]

I'M A LONG-TIME FAN and my boyfriend flips through every issue I receive, immediately opening to the Gore-Met. He's interested in reading all of them and we were wondering when exactly the section started appearing in the magazine?

E&R – ADDRESS WITHHELD

[The Gore-met's column first appeared in RM#14, March/April 2000. – Ed.]

CORRECTIONS:

In RM#138's A Legacy of Skulls feature, the photograph for skull eight was taken by Lacey Burns.

In RM#137 we incorrectly identified the singer for the Saint Vitus album *Lille F-65*. Scott "Wino" Weinrich is the frontman on that album

Rue Morgue regrets the errors.

EXPIRING MINDS...

EVERY WEEK ON RUE MORGUE'S FACEBOOK PAGE



When the US government shuts down, how does America fight the **ZOMBIE HORDES**?

The zombies will reach Washington and, searching for brains, will starve to death.

TOM BREEN

In a zombie epidemic there is no organized government action. It's every man, woman and child for themselves!

AARON VON LUPTON

Easy: crazy doomsday rednecks who live in bunkers and wouldn't give up their guns. But, then again, would they really help us? Would we deserve the help?

JOSEPH DZENCELOWCZ

Just go to Max Brooks' *Zombie Survival Guide*.

COLIN BAXTER

You Canucks better hope your free health care covers zombie bites, 'cause once they're done down here they're heading up there.

JOE SENA

The zombies are already running the country! We lost!

ROB MORGANBESSER

WE ENCOURAGE READERS TO SEND THEIR COMMENTS VIA MAIL OR EMAIL. LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR LENGTH AND/OR CONTENT. PLEASE SEND TO INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM OR:

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Dreadlines



NEWS HIGHLIGHTS & HORROR HAPPENINGS

GRAND GUIGNOL THEATRE MAKES A COMEBACK IN PARIS

Grand Guignol, dead since the 1960s, has returned to stain Parisian theatres with blood once again. Le Théâtre du Grand Guignol – now reincarnated as the International Visual Theatre – has officially reopened its doors with *Une sacrée boucherie* (*Bloody Butchers*), a humorous contemporary gore tale involving triplets, a butcher with memory lapses and a mother who's convinced that she's cursed. Produced by Philippe Carbonneaux, it is the first of more bloody stage productions to come.

The rebirth of Grand Guignol theatre is really being led by producer/director Frédéric Jessua, who will be heading to Switzerland next year to produce *Sous la lumière rouge* (*Under the Red Light*, a.k.a. *In the Darkroom*) by Maurice Level and Etienne Rey, about a man with a camera who makes a terrible discovery about his recently buried fiancée, as well as *Sabotage* by Charles Hellem, William Valcros and Pol d'Estoc, about a sick boy whose emergency surgery goes wrong due to a power outage. Both are new productions of classic Grand Guignol plays from 1911, which place the audience members in the position of voyeurs.

"The Grand Guignol turns each member of the audience into a peeping Tom whether he or she realizes it or not," Jessua tells *Rue Morgue*. "They know what they're going to see and why they're here. To me, Grand Guignol is the art of managing frustration."

Historically considered to be the birthplace of gore, Le Théâtre du Grand Guignol was where the French bourgeoisie, circa 1897 to 1962, went to indulge their craving for the macabre and erotic. The theatre regularly produced five to six plays a night that focussed on the more gruesome aspects of murder, torture and death, prefiguring the rise of gore films in the 1960s.

"Grand Guignol plays expose our deepest child-



Blood On The Boards: (above) L'Amant de la morte, and (inset) Un crime dans une maison de fous.

hood fears, our dirty little secrets," asserts Jessua. "They suck all the characters into a tragic spiral."

Even though the original venue has been long closed, the Grand Guignol never ceased to inspire theatre producers over the years. For example, in 2012, director Karine Jean decided to update *Un crime dans une maison de fous* (*Crime in a Madhouse*), a 1925 play by André De Lorde about a pretty asylum inmate who is blinded with scissors by two other jealous inmates, adding romantic and comedic

flourishes to the gory tale. This year, Isabelle Siou – producer of *Baiser de sang* (*Blood Kiss*), a 1929 play by Jean Aragny and Francis Neilson about madness and brain surgery – has plans to develop more horror theatre. She previously brought seven Grand Guignol plays to the stage in 2009.

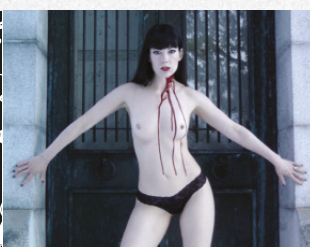
For his part, Jessua has also produced plays for Théâtre 13, including *L'amant de la morte* (*The Dead*

Lady's Lover; 1925) by Maurice Renard, involving a failed painter, the married object of his affections and hypnosis; and *Les détraquées* (*The Nutcases*, 1921) by Olaf and Palau, which is centred around rape and torture at an institution for girls. This comes on the heels of his adaptation of René Berton's *Tics* (1909), about an out-of-control sex addiction that causes physical tics; Georges Neveux and Max Maurey's *L'atroce volupté* (*Untolerable Pleasure*, 1919), which features an exotic dancer, a love triangle, a mysteriously paralyzed man and trepanation; and five other plays in the Grand Guignol tradition.

The performances often feature traditional hidden blood-pump practical effects, but employ more complex modern sets, sound and lighting, as well as performers that break the fourth wall by interacting with the theatregoers. Jessua believes that it's crucial for the Grand Guignol plays to evolve to fit a modern audience.

"I do think the technical aspect of the plays is very important," he says. "Finding the right props and sets is crucial in order to bring people into this unusual world of comedy and drama."

FABIEN DELAGE



KILL YOUR FRIENDS IN NEW DUNGEON MONSTER GAME

Remember playing arcade games and waiting for your friends to die so you could have a go? If you ever wished for a monster, zombie or swordsman to kill them so you could play, two designers in Australia have created a game full of '80s nostalgia that lets you do exactly what you've always wanted: kill your friend in the game in order to take his or her place.

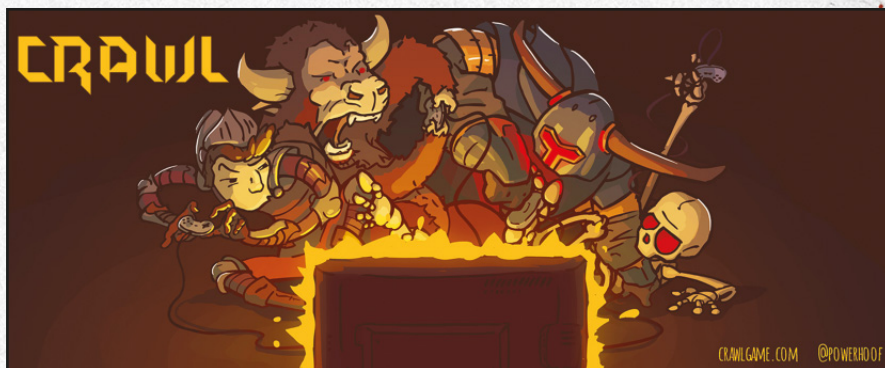
Crawl is a multiplayer title, currently being developed by independent company Powerhoof, which sees one player as the hero battling through a dungeon while others control monsters in an effort to halt the protagonist's progress. The player who is successful in taking out the hero instantly steps into his shoes and must race to get further, before the game culminates in an epic final battle.

Powerhoof founders Barney Cumming and David Lloyd both have experience in the gaming industry, and before starting their own company eight months ago, worked on mobile projects such as *Sims Free Play* and *Mass Effect: Infiltrator*. *Crawl* started out as a small idea the two put together for a game jam amongst friends, but the reaction to the concept was so enthusiastic, it became an obvious choice for their first real project together.

"I think that freedom to potentially make something crappy ended up being a good environment for creativity," Cumming says. "I hacked together a prototype over two days, which was a miracle considering I spent maybe half a day just making the blood smear in trails behind dead bodies when you hit them."

The two bring different expertise to the company; Cumming develops art and animation, while Lloyd handles programming. Although they both bounce ideas off each other, Lloyd gives artistic freedom to Cumming by providing the tools he needs to create this world.

"Creating these monsters is a dream project for me," says Cumming. "I think my most influential book was the *Dungeons and Dragons Monstrous Manual* – I'm trying to create my own species. For the most part, I want less orthodox-looking monsters: collections of appendages and orifices that just by their structure imply something



Crawl taps into '80s arcade nostalgia with its throwback graphics.

more alien and unknowable."

Crawl embraced arcade nostalgia by way of its pixel art style. "I thought mood would be more important than detail," states Cumming.

"An eyeball may be a single pixel, but a player will infer a scowl or a haunting stare based on the general atmosphere. It's been really fun to have a break from 3-D and get back to my roots. ... It feels a bit like being a kid again."

With the game featuring a mass of monsters attacking at every move, it's no surprise the guys grew up on horror games, such as *Quake*. Lloyd

notes that's not the only thing to have a big impact on *Crawl*, though.

"I have strong memories of games that scared me shitless when I was a kid, but I don't

think it was due to horror themes as much as the unforgiving difficulty of games back then – that heart-busting point where you've got further in a level than you've ever been before, you don't know what's coming but you know it's only a matter of time before you die and lose everything."

Crawl has already generated big online buzz and the creators are astounded by the intrigue.

"People really seem excited by the core concept of *Crawl*," says Lloyd. "There are a lot of people who miss the sort of arcade-y same-screen multiplayer games they used to play as a kid; it's great to know we aren't the only ones!"

Crawl is still in development with a projected release of early 2014. For more news and footage of *Crawl*, visit powerhoof.com.

CHARLOTTE STEAR

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ORIGINAL SVENGOLIE, JERRY G. BISHOP, DEAD AT 77

Jerry G. Bishop, creator of the popular Chicago-area horror host known as Svengoolie, died of a heart attack on September 15 in San Diego. He was 77 years old.

Prior to his three-year stint as Svengoolie, Bishop gained notoriety as a Cleveland DJ. He returned to his native Chicago in 1967 to host a morning radio show; three years later, he found himself working on a Saturday night horror movie program called *Screaming Yellow Theatre*. Though he started out doing voice-over work for the show, he soon began appearing on camera as the coffin-dwelling hippie known as Svengoolie. While the show occasionally featured classics such as *Fiend Without a Face* and *Bucket of Blood*, it generally favoured less illustrious titles such as 1967's *College Girl Murders*. Surprisingly, though, Bishop didn't much care for any of the movies he introduced.

"Jerry wasn't a fan of horror films," says Rich Koz, who took over the Svengoolie name when the show was relaunched in 1979. "He got a few notes from the film editor regarding the movie, but for the most part he never saw the films or based any of what he did on them. The films were just a framework for him to do his Svengoolie schtick."

With his long hair, headband and omnipresent



sunglasses, Bishop's Svengoolie was a radically different sort of horror host. He led a cast of characters that included a wig-festooned, screeching skull named Zelda and a ventriloquist dummy called Durwood. Bishop played several characters himself, including car salesman Mad Mad Sven and a chef known as the Galloping Ghoulmet. Bishop even gained a celebrity following; shows often began with famous guests such as Barry Manilow or Bette Midler opening Svengoolie's coffin.

Bishop initially tried to distance himself from the character after *Screaming Yellow Theatre* was cancelled in 1973. He moved to California, where

he won several Emmys as a morning talk-show host. Eventually, though, he embraced his status as one of television's best-loved horror hosts.

"I think he wanted people to know he was much more than just the Sven character," Koz points out. "He didn't miss doing the character at all – he was doing everything else, and just enjoyed entertaining. Yet, years later, when he would see people's reactions to his Sven character and realized how much it meant to people, I think he had a new pride in what he had created."

Koz's *Svengoolie* airs Saturday nights on MeTV.

APRIL SNELLINGS

ENTRAILS

➤ Deadline reported ABC Family closed a deal on a high-profile horror drama series starring Jamie Lee Curtis that will be directed by Steve Miner (*Friday the 13th Part 2* and *III*). Although there is no green light on the project yet, the series is called *The Final Girls* and will revolve around a group of women who have all survived their own personal horror stories and are brought together by a mysterious older lady (played by Curtis) who will harness their bad experiences for the greater good.

➤ Northampton, UK, is currently being tormented by a clown that looks like *It*'s Pennywise. The clown has become an internet sensation after appearing in various areas of the town, standing silently, holding balloons, flashing an evil smile and, in one video, even emerging from a lake. Passers-by have been taking photos and videos of the clown and posting them on Twitter, which has spawned numerous parody accounts. As of press

time, the identity of the person behind the makeup remains a mystery.

➤ Deadline.com reported that *Evil Dead* director Fede Alvarez is in talks to direct the film adaptation of the video game *Dante's Inferno*. Universal Pictures is bringing the EA title to the screen after winning the rights back in 2008. The game is loosely based on the first third of Dante Alighieri's 14th-century poem, *The Divine Comedy*. Since acquiring the rights, the script has been worked on by X2's Dan Harris, *The Pacific*'s Bruce McKenna and *Monsters: Dark Continent* writer Jay Basu.



➤ Elijah Wood's genre production house, The Woodshed, has rebranded itself as SpectreVision. The latest projects from the company, which was also founded by Daniel Noah and Josh C. Waller, are the horror comedy *Cooties*, set for release next year; *Toad Road*, which will have a cinematic and VOD release this year; and the vampire film *A Girl Walks Home at Night*, which is in post-production.

➤ A petition at change.org is asking Greg Aiello, Senior Vice President of Communications for the NFL, to have GWAR play the halftime performance at the 2015 Super Bowl. Jeff Cantrell of Morehead, Kentucky, started the petition stating, "We don't want another year of sitting around talking through a muted, boring NFL Super Bowl halftime show. ... We want a real spectacle that only GWAR can provide." At press time, the petition was 6,179 signatures short of the goal of 50,000.

➤ Eli Roth has announced there will be a sequel to his latest film, *The Green Inferno*, but he will hand over directing responsibilities to *AfterShock* helmer Nicholas Lopez. The project, currently named *Beyond the Green Inferno*, will be financed by Christopher Woodrow's Worldview Entertainment. Roth says he will produce the sequel based on a script he wrote with Lopez and Guillermo Amoedo (*AfterShock*, *Green Inferno*). *The Green Inferno* has no release date, but it was picked up for distribution in September by Open Road.

CHARLOTTE STEAR

MONSTRO BIZARRO

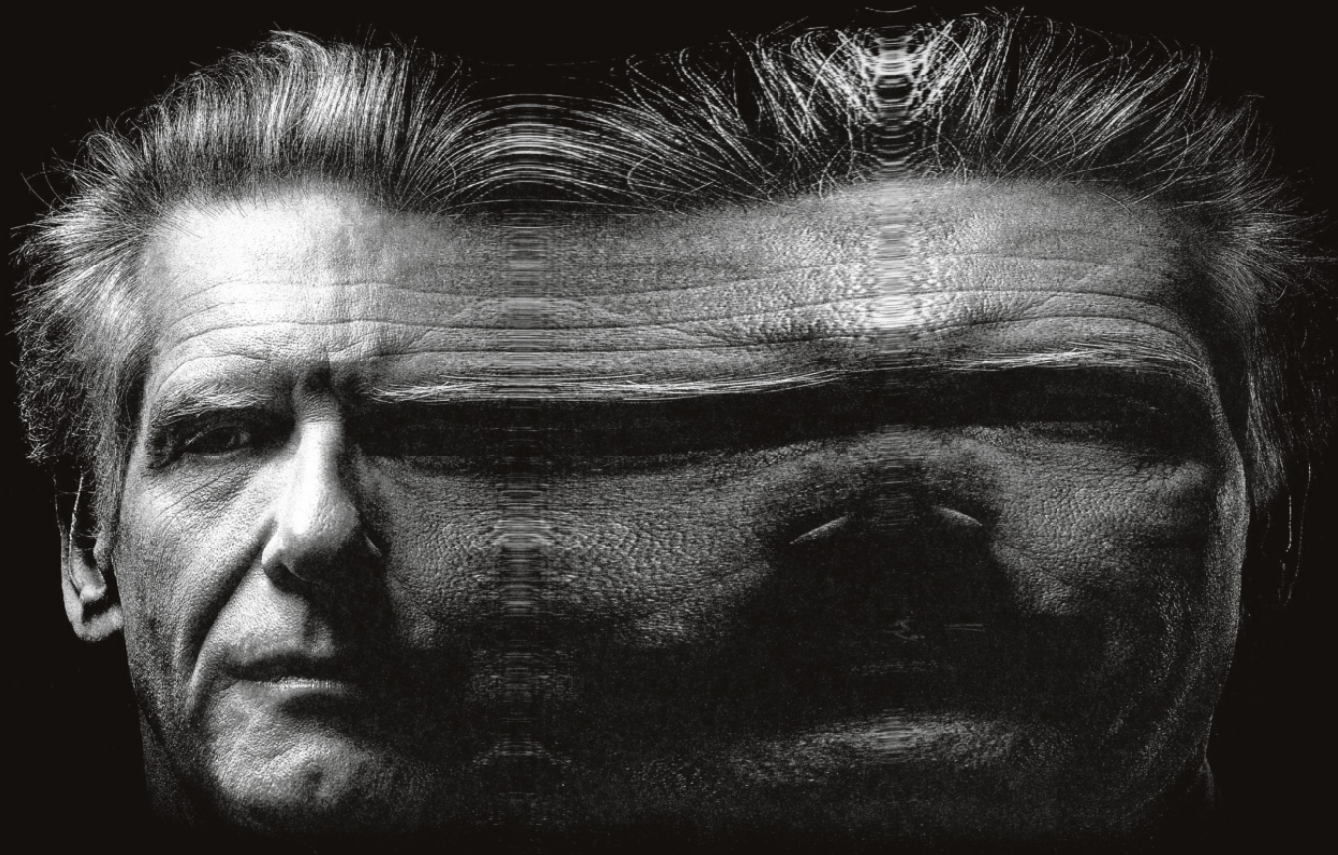
More Bigfoot movies are on the horizon. Principle shooting for the upcoming action monster movie *Bigfoot Wars*, recently wrapped in Texas. The film, based on author Eric S. Brown's popular book series by the same name, pits a small town against a horde of angry sasquatch. Directed by Brian Jaynes – whose previous outing, *Boggy Creek*, also mined the ever-growing "squatchploitation" genre – the film stars Judd Nelson, C. Thomas Howell and Holt Boggs. A tentative release date has been set for early 2014. Hot on the heels of *Bigfoot Wars*, indie filmmakers October People announced plans for *Valley of the Sasquatch*. According to a recent press release, the film will be "a creature feature which follows a fractured family who battle for survival against a tribe of territorial Sasquatch in the remote wilds of the Pacific Northwest." The movie is currently in pre-production.

LYLE BLACKBURN

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CORONER'S REPORT ★

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

CASE NO.

139

Street drug scopolamine (a.k.a. the “zombie drug”) puts those who ingest it into an extremely suggestible, zombie-like state; once they awake from it, they have no memory of what occurred.

Grand Guignol theatre founder Oscar Méténier also worked for the police department, where one of his duties was to escort condemned criminals to their executions.

Students at Dongguan University of Technology in China were asked to sign “suicide waivers” at the start of their most recent term. The paperwork absolves the institution of legal responsibility should any of its attendees kill themselves.

Peter Lorre (*The Man Who Knew Too Much*) changed his name when he decided to pursue an acting career. He was born László Loewenstein.

An elderly woman has been strangling pigeons in Cambridge, England; she began her gruesome hobby after failing to convince city council to rein in the birds. There is no word on whether she's been charged for literally taking the bylaw into her own hands.

NFL receiver Brandon Lloyd is adding a horror film to his CV with *After Effect*, in which he plays Sgt. Chuck Lloyd. The straight-to-DVD title is about a group of test subjects that discover that the experiment they are participating in will turn them into zombies.

Boston resident Geoffrey Portway pleaded guilty in September to charges of “child pornography and solicitation to commit a crime of violence.” Authorities allege Portway had detailed plans, which included a fully-functional basement dungeon, to abduct, rape and eat young children.

Both Madeleine and Mary Collinson, the twin *Playboy* playmates who won the role of the titular sisters in Hammer's *Twins of Evil* (1971), had their performances dubbed for that film.

“RIP trolling” is a term that's been coined to describe the deplorable, mostly anonymous practice of defacing online memorials for the recently deceased with hate speech.

Ray Dennis Steckler, director of *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies!!?*, got his start in the business as an army cameraman during the Korean War.

Two cars with skeletal remains within were discovered and hoisted out of an Oklahoma lake late this summer. Authorities suspect they belong to a group of teenagers who went missing in 1970 and a man who disappeared a year before that.

Before being sent the script for *The Walking Dead*, actress Sarah Wayne Callies (Lori Grimes on the series) didn't read or watch horror at all.

Australian authorities are investigating whether millipedes played a part in a train derailment after a slippery slurry created by thousands of squashed insects was found on the rails near the accident.

COMPILED BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT? SEND IT TO: [INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM](mailto:info@rue-morgue.com)

BODY HORROR

MARS ATTACKS

ARTIST: Inky Joe Hill (inkyjoestattoos.co.uk)

◀ “I did this piece a few years ago. I was very keen to do it, being a huge fan of the movie. I'm a sucker for screechy midgeets and green goo, so me and my buddy rocked down to the studio late one night and smashed it on his thigh. I didn't even charge the son of a bitch!”



THE RUE MORGUE SICK TOP SIX

MONSTERS OF THE CLOTH



1. EXORCIST III
PAZUZU'S PLAYTHING

2. HELLBENDERS
TOE-TASTING RABBI

3. CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD
PUTRIIFIED ZOMBIE PRIEST

4. DEVIL'S RAIN
BORGNIQUE OF THE BEAST

5. FROM DUSK TILL DAWN
FANGS FOR JACOB FULLER

6. LORDS OF SALEM
FULCI-STYLE FATHER



TORTURED TAGLINES

HE KNOWS YOU'RE ALONE (1980)

“EVERY GIRL IS FRIGHTENED BEFORE HER WEDDING. BUT THIS TIME THERE'S GOOD REASON!”

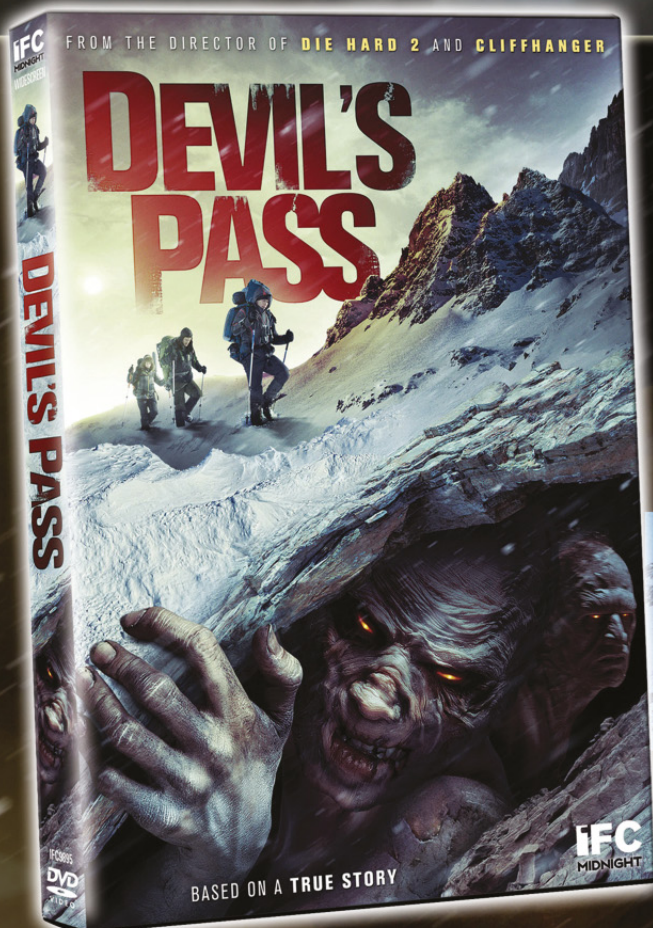
Necronomicomics BY JAY P. FOSGITT



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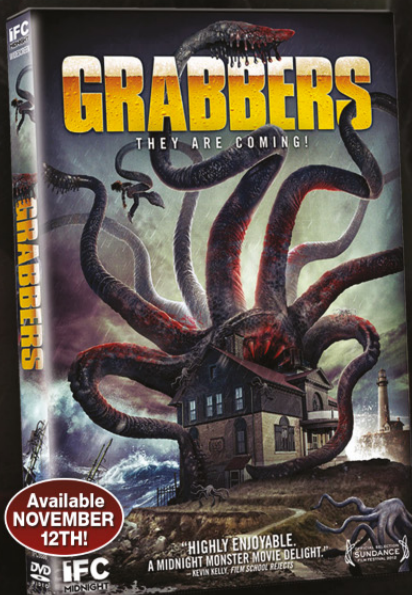


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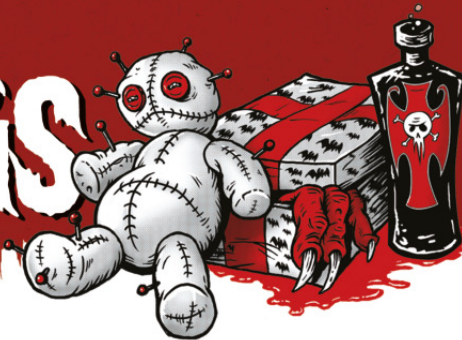
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NEEDFUL THINGS



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These 12" to 14" zombie garden gnomes by Revenant FX finally might keep those damn kids off your lawn. There's also a line of masked gnomes – including "The Springwood Terror," "The Crystal Lake Slasher" and "The Texas Chainsaw Butcher" – that'll really put the "deadly" in your nightshade patch.

Plant one at revenantfx.com.

2 CUSTOM WHITE BRONZE SKULL RING \$65

The devil's in the details of this carefully crafted skull ring, cast in white bronze. Behold the curve of the nasal bones, the detailing on the individual teeth, the structure of the jawbone. Perfect for the corporate goth and classic metalhead alike.

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3 TENTACLE DOORSTOP \$19.95

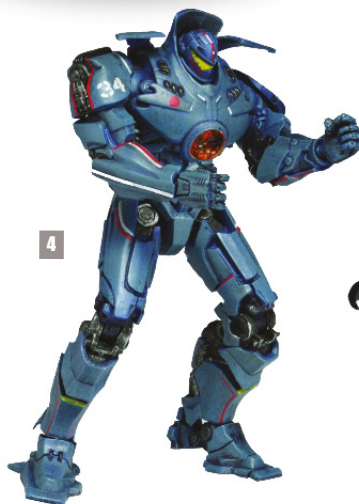
Sucker for cephalopods? Adore a ctenophora? Lovers of all things tentacled no longer have to suffer the indignity of trying to hold the door open with a live octopus: this rubber-padded resin doorstop will do the honours with nary a slip.

Strictly for suckers at neatoshop.com.

4 PACIFIC RIM ACTION FIGURES \$14.99-\$39.99

Although neural-bridging technology may still be a couple of years in the future, you can now stage your own epic jaeger-kaiju battles, pitting Gipsy Danger and Crimson Typhoon against the deadly Knifehead kaiju. The poseable figures stand 6" to 8" tall. Stompable Hong Kong not included.

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CRYPTIC
COLLECTIBLES

BOGLINS
(Mattel, 1987)

Introduced by Mattel in 1987, Boglins was a line of rubber monster hand puppets that featured movable arms, tails and glow-in-the-dark eyes, which could be manipulated via a mechanism inside the toy. The puppets – packaged inside cardboard boxes resembling wooden crates – initially consisted of three characters (Dwork, Drool and

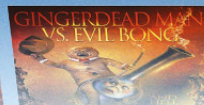
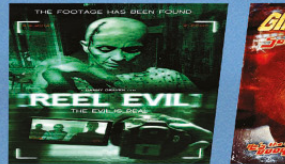
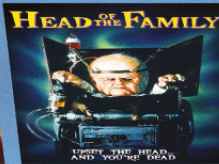
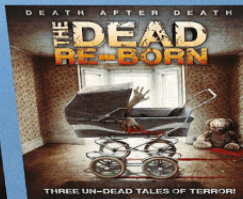
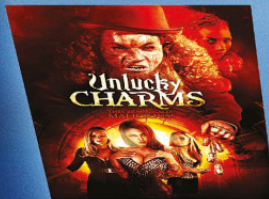
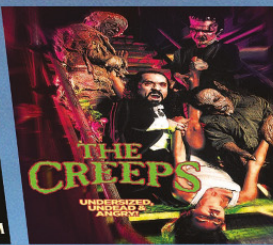
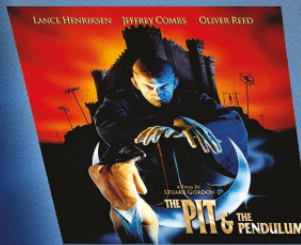
Llobb), but the line soon expanded to smaller scale offerings as well. Larger Boglins sell for around \$30 apiece loose (or \$70 boxed), while the rare Halloween jack-o'-lantern release is worth upwards of \$200.

JAMES BURRELL

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APOCALYPSE IN J.T. PETTY'S **HELLBENDERS**.
DO YOU KNOW WHERE THAT ROSARY'S BEEN?
.....

UNCLEAN SPIRITS

by
APRIL
SNELLINGS



H

ELL BREAKS LOOSE PRETTY QUICKLY IN J.T. PETTY'S PITCH-BLACK EXORCISM COMEDY *HELLBENDERS*. IN THE FILM'S OPENING SEQUENCE, A PAIR OF HILARIOUSLY FOUL-MOUTHED PRIESTS ARE CALLED IN TO DEAL WITH A RABBI WHO'S IN THE THROES OF DEMONIC POSSESSION, AND HAS NAILED A DOZEN ANIMALS TO HIS WALL AND EATEN SEVERAL OF HIS OWN FINGERS. FATHERS ANGUS AND LARRY MANAGE TO EXORCISE THE ENTITY, BUT NOT BEFORE THE POSSESSED RABBI GNAWS OFF SEVERAL OF LARRY'S TOES AND ISSUES A GRIM WARNING ABOUT A COMING INVASION.

It's all in a day's work for the main characters of *Hellbenders*, which scored a limited 3-D theatrical release from Lionsgate in late October. The horror-comedy follows the exploits of the Interfaith Augustine Order of Hellbound Saints, a Brooklyn-based team of exorcists who constantly debauch themselves so that, should they encounter a demon they can't exorcise, they can personally escort it to Hell by inviting it into their own bodies and then committing suicide.

Hellbenders echoes the set-up of Álex de la Iglesia's 1995 Spanish flick *Day of*

the Beast, which saw a priest trying to sin his way into a cult in order to assassinate the Antichrist, but trades that film's lone holy man for an interdenominational group that includes a gay Southern Baptist, a female Unitarian minister and representatives of several Catholic sects. Angus, played by cult favourite Clancy Brown, is the group's curmudgeonly leader, but its heart is Larry (*Pacific Rim*'s Clifton Collins Jr.), an excommunicated Presbyterian minister and good-natured fuck-up who loves his alcoholic wife and wants to support her recovery but is duty-bound to spend his days drinking and lusting after fellow Hellbender Elizabeth (Robyn Rikook).

Since the group must be "damnation-ready" at all times, they while away the



I ACTUALLY THINK A LOT OF THE
BEST HØRRØR MØVIES ARE
KIND ØF CØMEDIES IN DISGUISE.

J.T. Petty

hours between exorcisms by checking off a laundry list of sins: adultery, wrath, masturbation, bestiality, sodomy, etc. They operate in a hilariously bureaucratic world; records are kept (by Father Stephen, played by *The Wire*'s Andre Royo) to be sure they're meeting their sin quotas, while another group, the shadowy Bureau of Apocryphal Miracles, works to hide the Hellbenders' existence to the public.

The incident with the rabbi tips off the Saints that something is very wrong, but they don't realize just how wrong until they're called to the aid of a mentally handicapped man who's been possessed and chained up in a basement since childhood. When Elizabeth, the group's only female member, is compromised during the violent exorcism, the team is pitted against an ancient and very evil Norse god called Black Surtr. As the now-possessed Elizabeth goes off to gather Surtr's acolytes — a sequence that sets the stage for a gruelling series of found-footage clips collected through a contest held by the filmmakers — the Saints are left to deal with the messy aftermath, which involves bloodthirsty hordes of cultists and a gate to Hell that happens to take the form of a flaming, toothy vagina.

The film has garnered comparisons to *Ghostbusters* and *Animal House*, but don't be fooled; though it's consistently hilarious, it's also brutal and occasionally chilling. The idea that selfless sacrifice can be rewarded by a permanent seat at Satan's

table is a grim one, and *Hellbenders* delivers some gut-churning gore gags: noses are bitten off, eyeballs are sucked out of their sockets, faces are smashed and scraped against brick walls.

The intricate and demented world of the movie was conceived by North Carolina native Petty, who announced his presence on the horror scene in 2001 with the moody, near-silent ghost story *Soft for Digging*. He then found himself scripting video games such as *Splinter Cell* and *Batman: Vengeance* for gaming giant Ubisoft before going on to helm his second feature, 2003's direct-to-DVD sequel *Mimic 3: Sentinel*. The disturbing 2006 faux-documentary *S&Man* and the 2008 horror-western *The Burrowers* cemented Petty's reputation as one of the most intriguing voices in the new wave of indie horror. He's also tried his hand at graphic novels (*Bloody Chester*), children's fiction (the *Clemency Pogue* series) and even radio plays (an episode of Glass Eye Pix's *Tales from Beyond the Pale*).

Hellbenders is poised to bring Petty's film work to the widest audience so far. *Rue Morgue* caught up with him on the eve of the film's release. Via a telephone interview from his New York home, we gave him one last chance to unburden his soul.



DEMONS ARE
LIKE THE
WORLD'S WORST
THERAPISTS.
THEY ALWAYS
CONFRONT THE
EXORCISTS WITH
THINGS THEY
DON'T WANT TO
DEAL WITH.

J.T. Petty

According to IMDb, *Hellbenders* started out as a graphic novel. What was the genesis of the idea?

It was never a graphic novel. One of my producers is a compulsive liar and that sort of got out, but it's just not true. [Laughs.] I played around with ideas for a graphic novel and I definitely liked the concept almost as much as I liked the actual story. This could have been a TV show just as easily as a film. Just the idea of these priests who have to drag demons back to Hell – I do like the idea of continuing it onward. There was also a time when there was this whole bunch of uber-serious films coming out, and I just liked the idea of kind of poking fun at those rules a little bit.

I'm curious about what might have inspired this. Do you come from a religious background at all?

Off and on. I honestly don't really believe in anything. "Agnostic" is probably as good a description as any. My people were Moravians, which are like more boring Lutherans basically, and then my folks were Presbyterian for a little bit. I grew up in a shitty enough neighbourhood that they sent us to Catholic school because the public schools were kind of stabby. I went to Catholic school not knowing what a Christian was. My parents never talked about it. So I got this intense crash course in Catholicism for three years. About three weeks in, the other kids, who'd all been brought up going to church, got together on the playground and were like, "Listen, we've all been talking. You're not brown, so we figure you're probably Jewish." And for a year I thought I was Jewish. So my background is scattered enough to be perfect for not believing in anything.

The theme of demonic possession has been popping up a lot in horror lately; in the past few years we've had *The Last Exorcism*, *The Devil Inside*, *The Conjuring*, the *Paranormal Activity* films and so on. As a godless heathen, why do you think that's such a popular theme right now?

That's a tough one. I would say, demonic possession and ghosts are the two things that are easiest to believe. I read a study from the late '90s that said that more Americans believe in demonic possession than evolution. It's creepy and funhouse-y and it's goofy enough that it can be safe, but you can still sort



Inner Demons: A possessed rabbi with a taste for toes and fingers, and (inset) Norse symbols indicate the demi-god Black Surt.

of believe in it. Also, demons are like the world's worst therapists. They always confront the exorcists with things they don't want to deal with. [*The Exorcist*'] Father Karras can't figure out how to deal with his mom being crazy and dying, and then the demon just rubs his face into it until he's forced to deal with it. You have this literal demon pointing out what the character's figurative demons are. So narratively, demons are amazingly useful.

We're also seeing a lot of horror comedies that are overtly referential in their attempts to spoof the genre, but *Hellbenders* avoids that. You're playing with those exorcism film conventions, yet you dodged the obvious routes that might take. Was that a conscious decision?

For sure. The last thing I'd want to do is make *Scary Movie 7*. And one of my complaints [with genre cinema] right now is, we're kind of on the tail end of that VHS-kid generation. We've watched everything eighteen times, and so many of the most talented filmmakers right now are making movies that are just collections of references to other films. And I feel movies get pushed even further in that direction because critics love to be able to have an answer to a film, to say where it came from. I love genre and I love all these movies, but I'd never want to make something that's just a collection of references. Homage is boring. I like that you picked out that there are no really overt references [in *Hellbenders*]. The clichés of exorcism movies are so common and so repetitive

– it seems like it always follows the same general beats. That's the last thing I want to do.

Was it hard to get the tone right? Horror-comedies are very often funny, but they're usually not very scary. *Hellbenders* is both – it's hilarious, but there are also some very violent, frightening scenes. What's the key to nailing that balance?

It's a hard one. I'm not sure. I actually think a lot of the best horror movies are kind of comedies in disguise. *You're Next* is a comedy. I remember reading that script and thinking it was fucking hilarious. There was a lot of Buster Keaton-type shit in the first half of that script that didn't make it into the film. And Wes Craven is always kind of making comedies. *A Nightmare on Elm Street* has a lot of funny shit. Eli Roth has made comedies, and Sam Raimi – I think he thinks that shit's funny. For me, my instincts are always a lot darker and a lot of this was about trying to sort of loosen up and get into the funnier stuff. Then when it actually got scary, I could use those instincts to deal with it honestly. My favourite possession is the guy who's been possessed for 25 years, since he was a little boy, and the moment of him waking up as a ten-year-old kid in a 40-year-old man's body, and he's chained in a basement and has no idea how he got there – if you're going to honestly deal with that, it's got to be scary and weird.

Why was it important that one of the Hellbound Saints should be a woman?

Partly, it almost comes down to that one line where Elizabeth says, "I'm a woman and you're a Catholic. Everything I do is a sin." I liked her being part of that group. It's also supposed to be an illustration of different branches of Christianity, and Elizabeth is a Unitarian. I just loved all of that tension. If it is an interfaith group, there would be some priest who wouldn't even be allowed to be in the cloth in the other peoples' beliefs. And there's another thing – I'm from North Carolina, and the Appalachian rites of exorcism are much more casual than anything in the church. If there was ever a future iteration of *Hellbenders*, it would start to get into that sort of stuff. I just wanted it to be as diverse as possible. There was something of the Ninja Turtles in putting together a team of exorcists. You want them to be as widely varied as possible.

I love that the gate to Hell is a flaming vagina with teeth. Why is it that?

[Laughs.] There was a French magazine – *Cinefantastique*, I think – that had done an article about *Soft for Digging*, and so they sent me a copy of it. It was the same year that the first *Lord of the Rings* movie came out, so it had the Eye of Sauron on the front. The woman I was living with at the time saw this magazine and she said, "Oh, those fucking French. Of course they're going to have a giant, flaming vagina on it." After she said that, it was impossible to look at it and not see a giant, flaming vagina.

And you're thinking, this is gold, I've gotta use this.

Totally! And it does come up, and it's not just vaginas. Genitals are all over horror iconography and all over monsters. H.R. Giger's alien is obviously



Men In Black: Father Larry (Clifton Collins Jr.), and (below) Father Angus (Clancy Brown).

• a giant, black penis running around a ship called Mother. And the vampires that Guillermo del Toro came up with for *Blade II* – they have vagina mouths. Or the brainbug at the end of *Starship Troopers* might be the perfect example. It has a vagina in its forehead with a cock that comes out of it. Over and over again, that kind of stuff comes up. And it's sort of obvious, but the Church is so scared of sex and women in general, that a flaming vagina would be just about the scariest thing you can throw at the Vatican.

Let's talk about the makeup FX. The possessed have a very distinct look to them. Tell me a little about developing those visuals.

[Makeup artist] Brian Spears is brilliant. We had one specific thing for one of the main demons named Surt, who was an old Norse myth. A lot of the stuff I was bringing Brian as references were just all these pre-Christian ideas of what this demon was. He wasn't even a demon, he was a god, but he was a god who was going to come and destroy everything. It's a little bit subtle in the film, but it was all about these runes and Norse lettering, and the idea that [the possessed] would be carving them into their skin. But we wanted to be careful not to go into *Evil Dead* territory. Possession's a temporary thing, right? So I didn't want to have somebody go from being split in half to not being split in half. It's like at the end of the new *Evil Dead* – which I loved, I thought it was awesome – but she completely fucks herself up and cuts her tongue in half and all this shit, then you say "abracadabra" and she's cool. I love the idea of our folks walking away from [being possessed] and they'll be better, but they'll have scars for the rest of their lives. It was about going as far out to the edges as you could go without getting into goofy, supernatural stuff.

Why did you decide to shoot *Hellbenders* in 3-D?

That was part of the production deal, and

how we got the movie made. The production company basically gave us the film package and the deal was, we had to shoot in 3-D. I actually love 3-D. It was an amazing pain in the ass, and it slowed things down and it limited the movement of the camera enormously. But creatively, the idea of 3-D is amazingly compelling, especially for movies on a smaller scale. The thing that drives me crazy is that we're only using it on huge, \$120 million movies right now. There's no 3-D experience past 100 metres. If you look at a landscape and you see Godzilla coming, you're basically looking at a 2-D image because the parallax of your eyes is only about two and a half inches. But if you're sitting next to somebody, the 3-D there is completely real and amazing. My favourite 3-D movie so far has been *Life of Pi*. It was gorgeous, and it actually feels immersive in 3-D because you're ten fucking feet from the guy. So what I liked about the 3-D for *Hellbenders* is that you feel besieged, and you feel the menace.

And why wouldn't you?

Totally! Violence and gross-out humour is all about the physicality of it. So if you're in 3-D space, you can actually feel the depth of these characters and the roundness of them directly in front of you. The grossness of the demons and all the crunch of that violence plays that much harder.



There's a lot of world-building in *Hellbenders*. What kind of research did you do to create the film's mythology?

The exorcism books are great fun. I don't know if you've ever read Malachi Martin's *Hostage to the Devil*, but he's a guy who was around in the early '70s – he was a Jesuit or something – and he wrote a book that helped popularize this stuff. He was like the Sex Pistols before Nirvana. It was the book that came before William Peter Blatty's *[The Exorcist]*. It's all of his personal experiences as an exorcist, and there are these amazing stories in there of performing these [rituals]. As for the actual organization of the

Interfaith Augustine Order of Hellbound Saints, I love building those sorts of bureaucracies. It's what I love about *The Wire* – how deep it goes into the paperwork of the police force. The idea of doing that for the Vatican and for exorcists is pretty hilarious, for a couple of reasons. The most obvious one was important for *Hellbenders*: they're sinning all the time and they're keeping records on all that shit, so there's paperwork of all of the sins they commit. But even looking at the Ten Commandments or seven deadlies – murder is kind of terrible, but so much of the stuff that's sinful is ridiculous. The idea that God would care if you jerk off or fuck a guy or any of that kind of stuff – that's such a small-minded, stupid God. So trying to keep records of all that stuff is really funny.

So is there a lot more in this world you've invented, that didn't make it into the film?

Yeah, a decent amount.

What's something you really wish could have made it in, but didn't?

I'll tell you my biggest disappointment: I was originally supposed to make one of the segments in the first *V/H/S*, and it was going to be the story of that guy [in *Hellbenders*] from the Bureau of Apocryphal Miracles – him collecting his video evidence of something that seemed like a demonic possession. If you're trying to prove whether something is real or not, it opens the story up to the whole found-footage thing. In the end I couldn't do it because it wasn't a DGA [Director's Guild of Amer-

Cont'd on p.22

WITH A SPECIAL EDITION OF BOTH *DEMONS* AND ITS SEQUEL OUT THIS MONTH, SERGIO STIVALETI EXPLAINS WHY HIS AMBITIOUS EFFECTS FOR THE FILMS WERE A GAME CHANGER IN ITALIAN HORROR CINEMA



HELL, ITALIAN STYLE

by DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

THIS TRAGIC REHASH OF DAWN OF THE DEAD WILL SURELY FADE INTO WELL-DESERVED OBSCURITY IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME." PREDICTED CHRIS GALLANT ABOUT LAMBERTO BAVA'S DARIO ARGENTO-PRODUCED *DEMONS* (1985) IN HIS BOOK *ART OF DARKNESS: THE CINEMA OF DARIO ARGENTO*. Well, was he ever wrong. With a new deluxe DVD/Blu-ray edition of both *Demons* and *Demons 2* out this month – the latest of several reissues of the films over the years – it's clear that they have officially achieved cult classic status.

The concept of *Demons* is simple: a group of people are trapped in a cinema where a trashy horror film turns out to be a hellmouth of sorts; reality and the big screen collide, and before long, bloodthirsty demons bite and butcher everything that moves. When the survivors eventually make their way out of the barricaded building, they discover that the demon plague is spreading through the outside world, as well. Just like *[REC]*, only 25 years earlier, *Demons* is essentially a zombie apocalypse flick, its tagline proclaiming, "They Will Make Cemeteries Their Cathedrals and the Cities Will Be Your Tombs." The film's unique balance of trashy fun, non-

sequitur nonsense, imaginative set pieces, pulp “characters” and “dialogue,” hard rock music and insane action has never been fully recaptured.

It could be argued that *Demons* owes its success to a simplistic, fairly linear script by Italian standards (concocted by Argento, Bava, Dardano Sacchetti and Franco Ferrini), which serves as little more than a series of challenges for rising FX wizard Sergio Stivaletti. Having just proved his abilities in Argento’s *Phenomena* (1985), *Demons* was an opportunity to show off his hand at numerous gore and monster gags, including multiple bite and sword wounds, sliced limbs, a throat ripped out, human-to-demon transformations and even an entire demon popping out of the back of one of the infected. (Stivaletti would go on to collaborate with Argento on numerous projects, including Argento’s *Dracula 3D*, which was released last month – see review p.36.)

“He was first and foremost impressed by my enthusiasm and he knew he could rely on me,” says Stivaletti of the filmmaker. “After *Phenomena* it was possible for him to make a film with many complex effects. And when the idea for *Demons* came about, he said, ‘I have the man for the job.’ Although I was friends with Lamberto, it was Dario who told him, ‘Take Stivaletti, he’s the right man for our story.’ It was very courageous of him because I was very young and inexperienced back then.”

Argento’s leap of faith paid off tremendously. Italy had a solid tradition of movie gore, but the ambitious transformation and animatronic effects were a novelty, untried in Italian cinema up to that time. The result was a full-blown FX extravaganza with demonic mayhem that contains practically everything horror audiences love, including prosthetics, copious splatter, body parts, eye gouging, slime and pus, puppets, fake bodies, creatures, animatronics, you name it. However, the creations by Stivaletti and Rosario Prestopino were so good that they angered some of men’s peers.

“There was a bit of professional jealousy because I did not come from a film family, I did not come from the studio system; I came out of



nowhere, so many were suspicious” he explains. “I didn’t go to film school, I didn’t know anyone from the film industry. I was friends with Rosario; we worked together on *Demons*...with Patrizio Sforza. Most of the others saw me as an enemy, an intruder. For example, Gianetto de Rossi [the effects artist who worked on several Lucio Fulci films, including *Zombie* and *The Beyond*] wrote some not very good things about me. But I was always interested in trying something new, to be on the cutting edge, while most of the others grew pretty stale in what they did, and they did not evolve.”

The story opened things up effects-wise, as the demonic creatures with shining eyes were able to do many interesting things that rotten zombies at that time couldn’t, including running, mutating and being reborn. The result was fresh enough that *Demons 2* was made the next year. This time the mayhem takes place in an apartment building after a TV show about the previous demonic outbreak causes – in the surreal fashion of movies such as *Shocker* and *The Ring* – one of the creatures to come through the set and attack. A teenager named Sally Day (Coralina Cataldi-Tassoni) is bitten and the infection rages through her high-rise.

Although a script for *Demons 3* was reshaped into what became Michele Soavi’s *The Church* (1989), another proper sequel never happened.

“The problem is that Dario is no longer producing films,” explains Stivaletti. “Also, there are two possibilities: you can do an official sequel, which is one thing, or you can do an unofficial sequel, which is another thing. In the first instance there are some rights to be respected. But I have an idea for a story with more freedom. It would be great to do it officially, with Dario involved, but I don’t think that’s possible.”

If he had his way, the FX maestro – who directed 1997’s *The Wax*

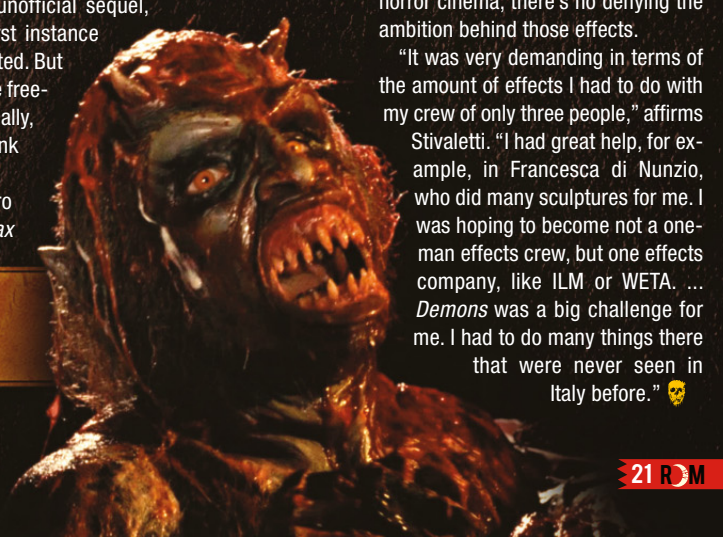
Mask, 2004’s *The Three Faces of Terror* and a segment called “Tophet Quorum” for the upcoming gore anthology *The Profane Exhibit* – would make another *Demons* movie in 3-D.

“I think it would work perfectly for this particular story because it is a spectacular concept and has to do with imagination. It would be a film in the vein of *[REC]*, with a point-of-view camera. It is a story about the effects, that is, about the mind behind the effects. Something between autobiography and fiction. I can tell it as a behind-the-scenes story of the making of *Demons*, about who really made the effects. It would be a story parallel to *Demons*, and could be shot entirely in my shop and around my home.”

Until that happens, *Demons* fans can watch for the steel case special editions of both movies, out this month from Synapse (order the limited deluxe editions exclusively from synapse-films.com). They are packed full of features, including new interviews and an audio commentary featuring Stivaletti. Even you aren’t among those who venerate the films as classics of Italian horror cinema, there’s no denying the ambition behind those effects.

“It was very demanding in terms of the amount of effects I had to do with my crew of only three people,” affirms Stivaletti. “I had great help, for example, in Francesca di Nunzio, who did many sculptures for me. I was hoping to become not a one-man effects crew, but one effects company, like ILM or WETA. ... *Demons* was a big challenge for me. I had to do many things there that were never seen in Italy before.” 🦋

They’ll Swallow Your Soul: One of Sergio Stivaletti’s famous demon makeups, (top) zombie-like demons overrun the theatre, and (inset) the covers for Synapse’s re-releases.



ZEMON NIGHT

DEAD BEFORE DAWN 3D

Starring Devon Bostick, Christopher Lloyd and Martha MacIsaac
Directed by April Mullen
Written by Tim Doiron
Wango Films

If you enjoy silly genre send-ups such as *Ernest Scared Stupid* or the *Scary Movie* franchise, you might like *Dead Before Dawn 3D*, but that's hardly a ringing endorsement, is it?

The silliness begins when cowardly Casper Galloway (Devon Bostick) reluctantly agrees to look after his family's Occult Barn shop for the afternoon, and his grandfather (Christopher Lloyd) warns him not to let anyone "come within spittin' distance!" of the cursed, skull-topped urn perched menacingly on one of the store's upper shelves. Naturally, Casper and his friends destroy the urn and mockingly invent a curse for themselves: starting at 10 p.m. that night, anyone from the group making eye-contact with someone not cursed will cause that person to commit suicide and raise Zemon, a zombie-demon that gives hickies in lieu of eating brains and can be enslaved with French kisses. Oh, and at sunrise the following morning, it all becomes permanent.

With the exception of Casper, the group isn't convinced the curse is real until 10 o'clock rolls around and they accidentally massacre an entire Friday-night football event, creating a Zemonic horde — reminiscent of the creatures in *Demons* — in the process. Armed with a crossbow, rolling pin and Hoberman sphere, the group climbs into a Winnebago and sets off on a quest to reverse the curse before dawn. Yes, it is every bit as contrived as it sounds.

Besides the fact that *Dead Before Dawn 3D* promotes itself as the "first-ever, live action, 100 percent Canadian feature film to be shot entirely in Stereoscopic 3D!" (Wow! Really?! Who cares?), and the weird creation of the Zemon species, there's nothing new here. The film re-explores the many fun ways a person can off himself — electrocution, jumping from a building, impalement, self-immolation, and so on — but not in a creative enough way to be particularly funny. Likewise, familiar faces such as Kevin McDonald (*Kids in the Hall*) and Boyd Banks (*Dawn of the Dead* remake) show up to try to balance out the predictable plot with slapstick performances, but their appearances only leave us wanting to watch their older works. Not nearly as much possessed fun as *Hellbenders*, the dull romantic subplot, tired clichés and anticlimatic ending are all just too familiar.

MOANER T. LAWRENCE



ica] project. I'm a union guy, the project wasn't. Broke my heart.

You've got a very diverse body of work. As a horror fan, what kinds of things do you gravitate toward?

I'm always drawn to originality and story. I actually think that American horror right now is getting really interesting. The so-called torture-porn years felt a little bit empty to me. The *Saw* sequels started to wear on, and it felt like there was a gap there. But with the Simon Barrett and Ti Wests and Adam Wingards and Jim Mickle and all those guys, there is something interesting happening right now. My tastes are pretty varied. In terms of the stuff I'm making, I think my career has been hurt a little bit because I'm not comfortable settling down into a genre. *Burrow-*

ers is a western. It just happens to have monsters in it. For a hardcore horror audience, Lionsgate's obviously going to sell that thing as a horror film. But the pacing and the structure and the way the character arcs work, just don't follow that. And then *S&Man* is like an essay. It's just what I was interested in abstractly; there's kind of a story there, but not really. I think I'm always trying to find a new angle.

***Hellbenders* is pretty hard to sum up in a few words. A lot of people are doing the "Jaws in space" thing — it's being called *Animal House* meets *The Exorcist* or it's *Ghostbusters* with demons. How do you feel about those comparisons?**

People have to go into it with expectations. I think *Ghostbusters* is a fair one in ways, but it's a bad one too because you can't live up to *Ghostbusters*. That combination of people and that tone and that movie and that time were so perfect. But it's certainly more *Ghostbusters* than *The Exorcist*. It is frustrating that you have to compare everything to something else, but it's how we live.

What's next for you?

I just did an FX test for a movie I want to shoot next.

Can you tell me anything at all about it?

It's way too early. It's a kind of monster movie that nobody's made a good one in, like, 80 years. It's another sort of small New York thing. We'll see.

Do you have any plans to revisit the world of *Hellbenders* in a sequel, or possibly even another medium?

I don't know. We'll see how audiences like it. The post-production process was just awful. It got ugly. There were too many cooks in the kitchen, and all sorts of stories I shouldn't tell. But if all the right people died in a bus crash, I'd probably make another one. ☹️

Body And Blood: The demon's work, and (above) Father Angus and Father Larry kick ass for the Lord.

PREMIERING ON CABLE THIS WINTER














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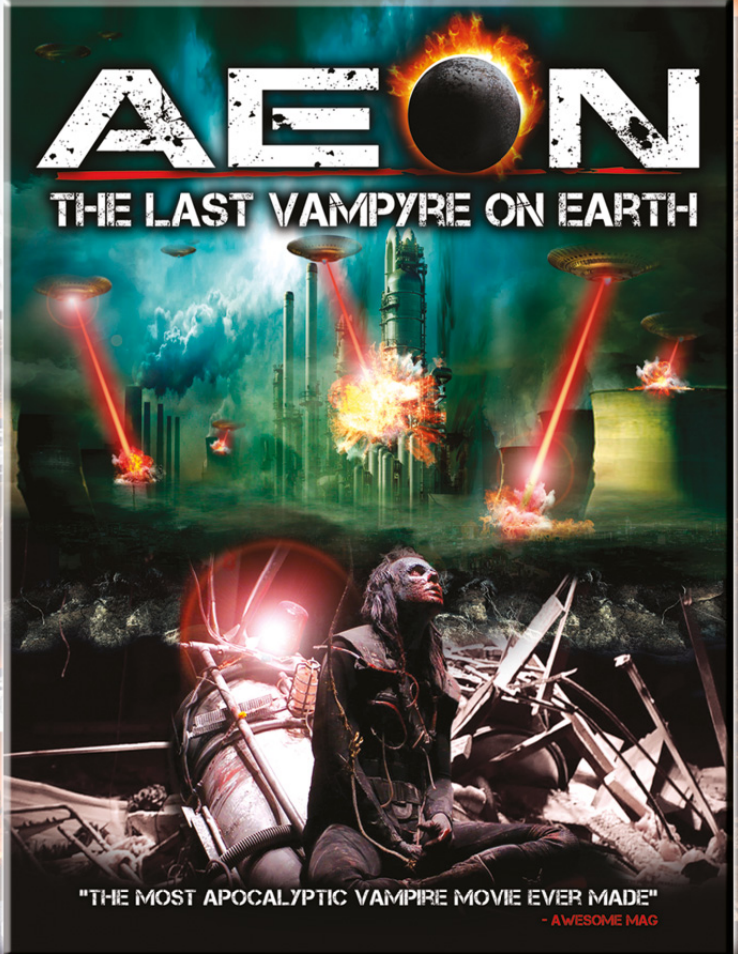


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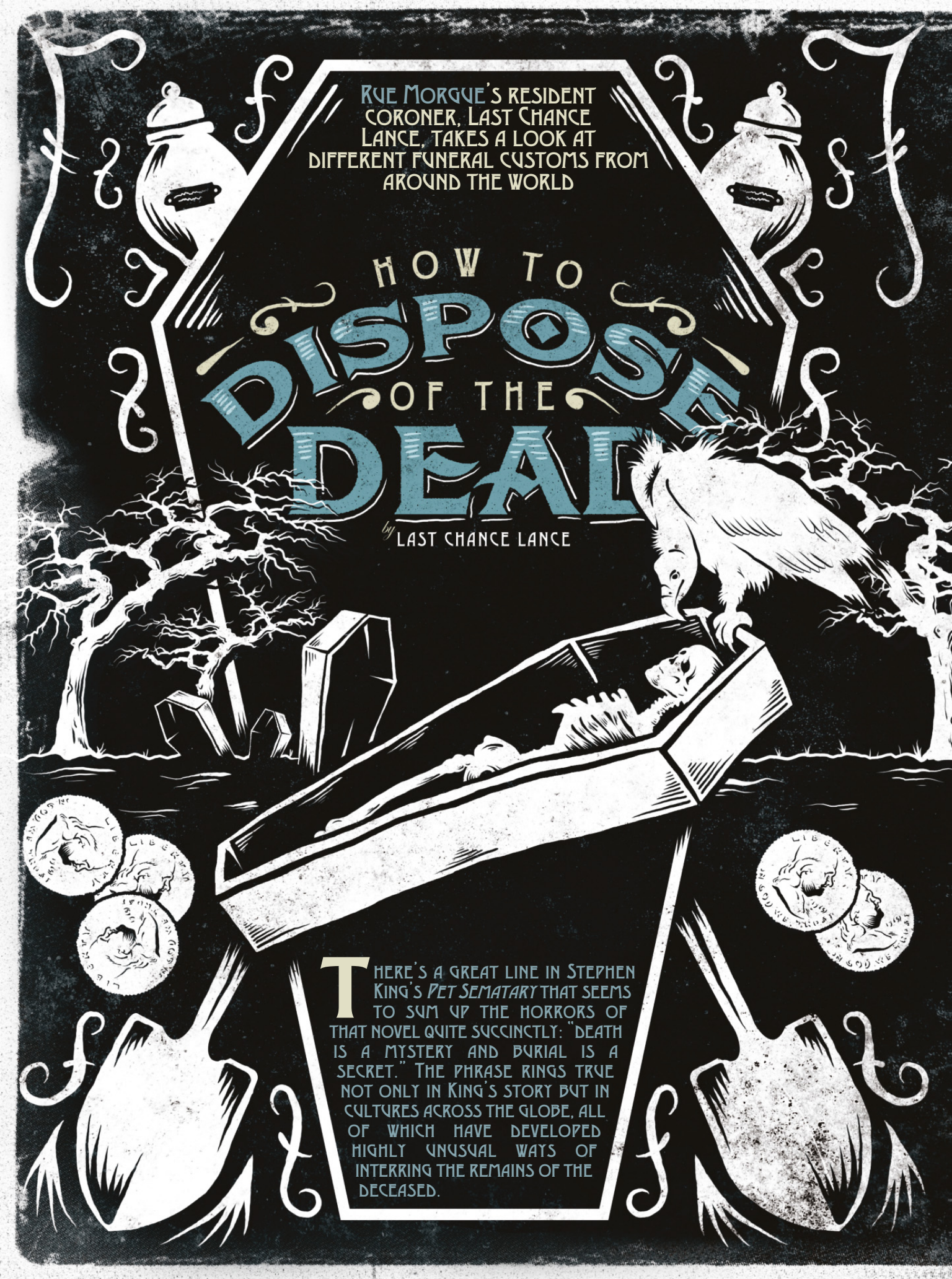
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RUE MORGUE'S RESIDENT
CORONER, LAST CHANCE
LANCE, TAKES A LOOK AT
DIFFERENT FUNERAL CUSTOMS FROM
AROUND THE WORLD

HOW TO DISPOSE OF THE DEAD

LAST CHANCE LANCE



THERE'S A GREAT LINE IN STEPHEN KING'S *PET SEMATARY* THAT SEEMS TO SUM UP THE HORRORS OF THAT NOVEL QUITE SUCCINCTLY: "DEATH IS A MYSTERY AND BURIAL IS A SECRET." THE PHRASE RINGS TRUE NOT ONLY IN KING'S STORY BUT IN CULTURES ACROSS THE GLOBE, ALL OF WHICH HAVE DEVELOPED HIGHLY UNUSUAL WAYS OF INTERRING THE REMAINS OF THE DECEASED.

For thousands of years, there have been people specifically employed to handle this task. Funeral directors, undertakers, embalmers, gravediggers or morticians: they all make up the fascinating yet macabre world of the funeral industry.

Though there is no complete written record of the first human burials, it's possible that the practice of burying the dead dates back nearly 350,000 years. A recently discovered archaeological site in Atapuerca, Spain, has uncovered an area filled with the fossilized remains of 32 hominids of the species *Homo heidelbergensis*, an ancestor of Neanderthals and modern humans. It is thought to be the oldest mortuary in existence.

As humanity spread across the Earth and developed its various cultures and religions, so too did it cultivate particular beliefs and approaches to caring for the dead. Even so, because so many European immigrants came to populate North America, the funerary customs of both continents have resembled each other quite closely for hundreds of years and have changed very little over time. The majority of people were buried in church cemeteries or on private land after some kind of religious ceremony either held at a house of worship or in the comfort of the home. The body could be put on display for a short time, surrounded by fragrant flowers to repel the sour smell of decay, while those in nearby cities or towns made the journey to pay their respects.

But as the world embraces new ideas and new technology, so does the funeral industry evolve. Currently, there is a growing movement in Europe and North America towards "green" funerals to curb the estimated 830,000 gallons of embalming fluid that go into the soil every year in America alone. Instead, people are looking to return the body to the earth either naked or wrapped in a simple linen cloth.

Recently, a Swedish company called Promessa invented a process that will freeze-dry your body in liquid nitrogen and then pulverize it with a high-frequency vibration that'll reduce it to a fine powder, which can be safely buried or used in your garden as mulch. Another company in Bonhyang, South Korea, has developed a process that takes the cremated remains of the departed and transforms them into shiny blue-green, pink or black beads that are typically displayed inside glass containers but can easily be worn as decorative jewelry. A UK-based venture business called Vinyly (to rhyme with "finally") will have your ashes pressed into a record of your choice. And for those with more expensive tastes, there are several US-based companies that will have your cremains pressed into a diamond or even shot into orbit or deep space in a capsule.

In other parts of the world, tradition still holds sway, though, and some rites and rituals have not shed their macabre associations. Others have evolved them into unusual customs. Read on for a sampling of what's available around the world, and take time to pick your place to die.

THE WAKE

The Irish, at home and abroad, usually choose to hold a "wake," which is a social gathering that takes place around the corpse until the time of the funeral. This frequently involves eating, drinking and dancing, and could often be mistaken for a raucous party (well, okay, perhaps it is), but is actually meant as a watch or vigil to ensure that the body is safe from harm.

JAZZ FUNERAL

In Louisiana, funeral traditions evolved from a unique blending of African rituals, French musical traditions and Christian pagentry into what is now known as a "jazz funeral." The ceremony begins with a jazz band leading the family members as they march slowly down the street carrying the coffin from the home or church to the cemetery. Once the coffin is placed in the ground or crypt, the entire ceremony switches gears from sober to celebratory. Upbeat songs replace the solemn dirges and the handkerchiefs that were once used to wipe tears away are waved high in a celebration of life.

EMBALMING

During the US Civil War, the practice of embalming was employed so that the bodies of fallen soldiers could be shipped home for burial, which could sometimes take days or weeks. Today, nearly every deceased person in North America is embalmed before a funeral. Embalming consists of the disinfection of the body, the posing of the facial features for subsequent viewing, and then a four-step process, which flushes the natural bodily fluids out of the blood vessels and

internal organs and cavities and replaces them with preservative solutions.

BURIAL SOCIETY

Jewish religion forbids the embalming or cremation of a dead body and dictates that it's to be considered a source of impurity and must be returned to the earth as soon as possible. The only approved form of disposition is burial, which is supposed to be performed within 24 hours after death. However, there are exceptions to the rule and there may be delays if the body is being autopsied or shipped overseas for burial in Israel. The care of the deceased is directly overseen by a rabbi or members of the local *chevra kadisha* (Burial Society), who ensure that the body is guarded all day and night in a well-lit room and that a *shomer* is present to recite prayers within earshot of the deceased.

The body is thoroughly cleaned and dressed in a simple white, hand-stitched shroud called a *tachrichim*. Though most burials in Israel are performed without a coffin or casket, for Jews being buried in a country where one is re-



Photo: Infrogmation



Ready The Remains: A Louisiana jazz funeral circa 1994, and (above) examples of vintage embalming fluids.



Photo: Christopherswe

quired by law, it must be constructed out of wood without the use of nails or glue. The simplicity of both the clothing and the coffin are to permit both rich and poor people to be treated equally. Open caskets at Jewish funerals are strictly forbidden and considered a sign of disrespect, as they would allow enemies to mock the deceased in their most helpless state.

BODY TO THE RIGHT

Traditional Muslims believe that the body is sacred and that burial is the only respectful method of disposition. The deceased is typically washed by a close relative and shrouded in a clean, white, perfumed burial shroud called a *kafan*; it is to be placed into the ground as soon as possible, preferably without a coffin, depending on the laws of the land.

Women are traditionally not allowed to take

part in the burial, though this is changing, particularly in the West. As the burial progresses, mourners will gather to hold a joint prayer for the dead and any wailing during the service is severely frowned upon. As a final sign of respect, the body must be laid in the ground on its right side, facing the holy city of Mecca, with its head resting on a brick or stone.

CREMATION

Hindus have specific rituals for honouring their deceased, which revolve around the sacred act of cremation. If possible, the funerary rites are started immediately after death, though there may be a delay until family members can arrive from distant villages. According to sacred Hindu texts, only a male family member is allowed to perform last rites; however this has recently begun to change as well.

Though the rites may vary slightly depending on the beliefs of the many different Hindu communities around the world, in most cases the body is cleansed immediately after death and, under the guidance of a local priest, is anointed with consecrated ash and ritual marks of the community while sacred mantras are chanted.

Members of the immediate family then decorate the body with flowers, place some rice in its mouth as nourishment for the departed soul, and put a few coins in its hands. The body is then placed on a wooden stand and taken to where it can be safely cremated.



To The Next World: Vultures strip human remains in a sky burial, (above) a body is prepared for a Hindu cremation, and (right) a Nōkan ritual is performed in the 2008 Japanese film *Departures*.



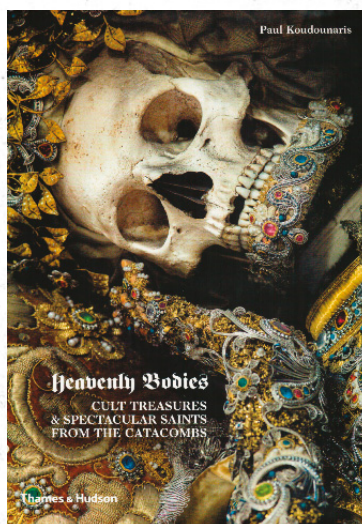
REVERENCE AND REMAINS

HEAVENLY BODIES: CULT TREASURES & SPECTACULAR SAINTS FROM THE CATACOMBS

Paul Koudounaris
Thames & Hudson

"Mind-blowing" is word that often comes to mind when describing the adventures of Paul Koudounaris. With camera in hand, the occasional *Rue Morgue* contributor has travelled the world exploring catacombs, burial caves, bone churches and other ossuaries (see *RM*#117 and #135). Now he trains his lens on the lavishly decorated remains of supposed saints, housed in churches across Europe, for the 192-page hardcover *Heavenly Bodies: Cult Treasures & Spectacular Saints from the Catacombs*—his most dramatic pairing of the morbid and the sublime yet.

As Koudounaris details in the comprehensive history of



the skeletons that accompanies his photos, the story begins in 1578 with the discovery of ancient Roman catacombs believed to be filled with the bones of hundreds, possibly thousands, of Christian martyrs. Reeling from the Protestant Reformation, which saw countless Roman Catholic relics destroyed, the Church disseminated full and partial skeletons of the so-called saints (as the author explains, the definition was often very loose) to houses of worship across the German-speaking regions of Europe.

Upon arrival, the highly venerated bones would be outfitted in elaborate, painstakingly made clothing and armour. Covered in lace, jewels and sometimes given weapons, they were posed and displayed for the public as holy symbols with supernatural powers, and represented self-sacrifice and the riches that awaited in the afterlife. They're

The most sacred place for cremation in India are the burning ghats on the shores of the Ganges River. This is where the body is placed on a large pile of wood, doused with incense and a clarified butter called *ghee* and then set on fire by the eldest son.

A lamp is lit near the place where the person died to light the way for their departed soul and some water is also kept there for its nourishment. The next day the ashes are collected and immersed in a river or ocean; or scattered over the ground.

SKY BURIAL

Zoroastrians are a religious sect from Indo-Persia who traditionally commemorate a death with what is known as a "sky burial." A dead body is considered to be a pollutant and must not make contact with the Earth. So it's taken to the top of a Dakhma (Tower of Silence), where it's left exposed to the elements and any predators that may come upon it. The cleaned and bleached bones are later collected and left to disintegrate in a pit near the centre of the tower. Though the custom has been banned in most countries, it's still practiced in isolated parts of India, Pakistan and Iran.

Sky burial is also used by the Buddhists of Tibet, who have been practicing it for thousands of years – only they take it a step further. It is common for them to perform a ritual dissection where bodies are cut up into pieces so they can be fed to the animals that range across the land, particularly birds. Even if the body is left intact, vultures and other birds of prey can strip an entire adult corpse down to the bones in less than ten minutes.

Although this may appear to the outside world to be horribly disrespectful, it's completely in keeping with Buddhist beliefs that a dead body is nothing more than an empty vessel. Because Buddhists believe in respect for all forms of life,

it's considered a great act of honour and charity to have one's remains used to nourish another living creature.

HELL MONEY

In China, those attending a Taoist funeral may find themselves involved in a noisy affair involving wailing and the burning of clothes and "Hell money" that the deceased can use in the afterlife. Mourners may also be given an envelope containing a small sum of cash as well as a candy and a piece of red string. The candy should be eaten and the money spent before returning home. The red string is to be affixed to the front door of the mourners' houses to ward off any evil spirits that may have followed them home from the cemetery.

ARMBANDS AND WATER OF THE LAST MOMENT

In South Korea, Buddhist male mourners typically wear armbands that denote their relationship to the deceased and must grieve next to them for a period of three days. Up until the year 2000, more than half of all deceased Koreans were buried, but that has changed dramatically with now over 70% of families choosing cremation. (This practice is also extremely popular in Japan, where an estimated 99.8% of deceased people are cremated.)

After the death of a loved one, relatives will moisten the lips of the corpse with water as part of an act known as *matsugo-no-mizu* (water of the last moment), which is done to ward off evil

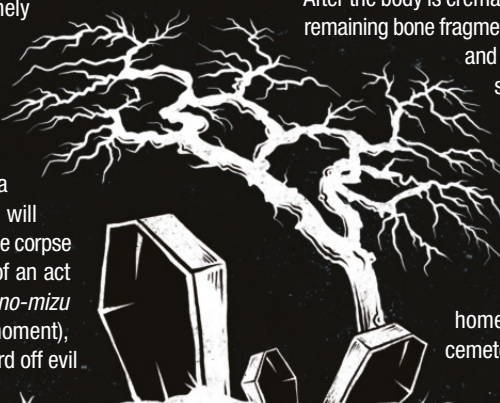
spirits and hasten the soul along its way. The body is then washed and its orifices are packed with cotton, in order to preserve it for the mourning process.

NOKAN RITUAL

In some areas of Japan, a professional group of morticians still perform the *nokan* ritual, for which the deceased is prepared, dressed and placed inside of a coffin. Men are usually outfitted in suits while women are dressed in a white kimonos. The body is then packed with dry ice inside the coffin, along with other items such as sandals, books, food, photos of relatives and sometimes even cigarettes if they were smokers. Most importantly, six coins are also put inside in order for the dead to be able to pay to cross over the Sanzou River, which is very similar to the ancient Greek myth of the River Styx, in which the dead had to pay the ferryman for passage.

The coffin is then placed on an altar with the head facing north and after a day of praying, burning incense and the exchanging of money sealed in condolence envelopes, the deceased receives a new Buddhist name in order to prevent his return to Earth if his old name is spoken. The family purchases these names from the temple priests and they can be very elaborate, depending on the amount paid for them.

After the body is cremated, relatives remove the remaining bone fragments using long chopsticks and place them inside an urn starting with the toe bones and finishing with the skull. This is done to ensure that the deceased is not placed inside the urn upside down. The urn is then taken to a relative's home or transferred to a cemetery.



the kind of outrageous treasures you'd expect to find in an Indiana Jones movie.

After several hundred years, the practice fell out of favour and many were destroyed or hidden away, but some remain and Koudounaris has tracked them down. Over 100 gorgeous, sometimes creepy, shots of 70 different skeletons fill *Heavenly Bodies* and help tell the back stories of the various "saints" on display, as well as provide a broader picture of ecclesiastic dedication and religious opulence.

Rarely, if ever, have human remains been transformed into such ornate objects of worship. And never has this strange death ritual been so comprehensively explored. These are anything but a bunch of old bones – simply stunning from start to finish.

DAVE ALEXANDER



ASH AND SACRIFICE

In some South African communities, when a person has died in a house, all of the reflective surfaces are covered up and the windows are smeared with ash. The day before the funeral, the body of the deceased is returned home before sunset and placed in his or her former bedroom. A night vigil is then held and sometimes the ritual killing of an animal is done in the belief that it will prevent further misfortune from befalling the family. The hide of the slaughtered animal can then be used to cover the corpse or is placed on top of the coffin. Traditionally, the burial takes place before sunrise, in order to protect the body from evil shamans or sorcerers who awaken later in the day and might prowl for corpses to use for diabolical purposes.

A COWHIDE SHROUD

In Tanzania, relatives will move a dying man from his house to a temporary hut while the oldest brother gathers people to dig the grave. A cow is killed and skinned and its hide is cut in two, and placed over and under the body. The corpse is then lowered into the grave on its right side, to face the rising sun. Everyone who took part in the burial must bathe and the widow must spend three nights with a *mwesha* (sanctifier), who is brought in from a different tribe to sleep with her.

CRAZY COFFINS

In certain parts of Ghana it has become fashionable for people to be buried in incredibly elaborate coffins that can resemble anything from an airplane to an antelope. The Kane Kwei Carpentry Workshop in Teshie, Ghana, routinely receives orders to craft coffins in the shapes of buildings, fruits, vegetables and even Toyota Corollas.

DIGGING UP THE DEAD

In Madagascar, it's commonplace for a family to dig up the bones of their dead relatives once every seven years and parade them around the village to live music in a ceremony called "famadihana" (the turning of the bones). The remains are removed from their old shroud and then wrapped in a new one and reburied. The old shroud is washed and used to cover the matrimonial bed of childless newlyweds in the belief that it will help bless them with children. 🙏



Body Movin': Bones are dug up and paraded around in Madagascar, and (below) examples of unusual and elaborate coffins in Ghana.

Photo: Hery Zo Rakotondramanana



Photo: Jean-Michel Rousset

Photo: Emilio Labrador

THE REAPER'S HANDBOOK

LAPHAM'S QUARTERLY — DEATH

Lewis H. Lapham, ed.
American Agora Foundation

Do you like to pontificate on passing? Meditate on all things morbid? Worry about becoming worm food? Well, you're not the only one.

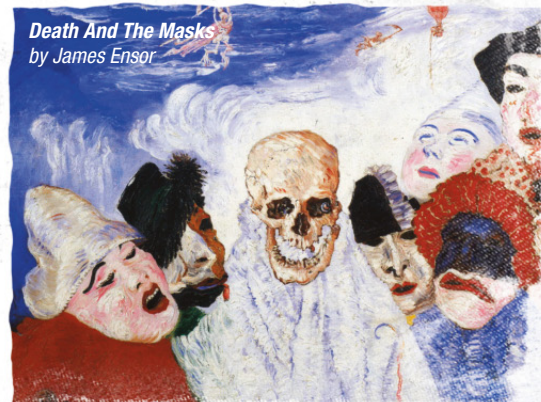
Give your morbid interests a workout with this Fall edition of *Lapham's Quarterly*, which offers 226 jam-packed pages on all things death-related. Opening with an infographic illustrating various cultures' post-mortem practices throughout history, and presenting a timeline for corpse decomposition, it leads into an editorial by founder and publisher Louis Lapham. With intimate detail, the 78-year-old reflects upon the death of his grandfather and father, as well as his own impending end.

Then, the bulk of this handsomely designed edition focusses on three main sub-themes: Preparation, Expiration and Post-Mortem. Reaching back to the beginning of recorded history, there are dozens of paintings, poems, essays, photos, book passages and sculptures about the Big D — rounded out by quotes ("Death is a black camel that kneels at every man's gate" — Turkish proverb), charts (e.g., tools used for capital punishment throughout the ages) and infographics (including last words from famous people).

Some of it amounts to fascinating factoids, such as Brent Cunningham's piece on the last meals of condemned prisoners; some entries are deeply personal, as is the well-reasoned suicide note of Iraq War veteran Daniel Somers, who describes his need to escape crippling, constant physical pain; much of it is grimly philosophical, including "Leo Tolstoy on the Moral Sufferings," from 1882; and some are particularly visceral, notably Mary Roach's visit to the University of Tennessee's body farm.

There's a real emphasis here on death across time and space, and the endless ways in which it affects us. So, whether you want to contemplate corpsehood, gather some grim anecdotes or just soak up the palour of the historical paintings on display, *Lapham's Quarterly — Death* is dark delight.

DAVE ALEXANDER



Death And The Masks
by James Ensor



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MIDNIGHT MADNESS, THE GENRE JUNKIE PORTION OF THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, TURNED 25 THIS YEAR. WE GIVE YOU A SNEAK PEEK AT THE HORROR TITLES THAT PREMIERED THERE, AND THE OTHER GLOBAL TERRORS UNLEASHED AT...



TIFF 2013

by Dave Alexander, Stuart F. Andrews, Phil Brown, Monica S. Kuebler, Liisa Ladouceur, Sean Plummer and Tal Zimerman



AFFLICTED (Canada) Clif Prowse and Derek Lee

You can't fault the makers of found-footage vamp flick *The Afflicted* for a lack of ambition. Derek Lee and Clif Prowse wrote, directed and star in this story of college guys on a European vacation who, after a run-in with a woman who turns one of them into a vampire, record the physiological changes. Lee is fun to watch as his character discovers both new weaknesses (sun, human food, etc.) and physical powers, in excellent FX sequences that recall *Chronicle*. Too bad it's so frustrating watching them take forever to figure out the obvious. And like most found-footage movies, the I'm-going-to-keep-filming-this-because-I-don't-know-what-else-to-do reasoning is just plain dumb. The action picks up towards the bloody end, but by then it's clear mediocrity is its own affliction. **DA**

ALMOST HUMAN (USA) Joe Begos

When Mark vanishes in a blast of blue light and deafening distortion, his buddy Seth and fiancée Jen are left to make sense of what happened. Two years later, Seth is still shaken and Jen has moved on, but Mark reappears and he's... different. Hacking, shooting and stabbing his way through the townsfolk, the alien-corrupted version of his former self seeks out his old love to force a gift upon her. Highlighted by solid performances (Josh Ethier is particularly menacing as Mark), tight editing and top-level sound design, this year's Midnight Madness indie underdog definitely reads like a love letter to '80s action/horror/sci-fi hybrids, yet never winks at the audience or force-feeds you its influences (by alien impregnation appendage or other means). **TZ**



CANNIBAL (Spain) Manuel Martín Cuenca

The polar opposite of Eli's Roth's midnight movie *The Green Inferno*, this arty, paced character study is light on physical atrocity and heavy on emotional angst. It details the inner struggles of Carlos (the amazing Antonio de la Torre), a highly skilled tailor in Grenada, Spain, who dines on women he butchers at his mountain cabin. Withdrawn but dangerously methodical, his run-in with a beautiful new Romanian neighbour ends in her disappearance but leads him to fall in love with her sister, who shows up to investigate. Caught between his need to stay safely detached and his inescapable desires, Carlos must figure out if he's man or monster. It's painterly, and wonderfully acted, but if you're looking for genre thrills, *Cannibal* will leave you with hunger pangs. **DA**



ALL CHEERLEADERS DIE (USA) Lucky McKee and Chris Silvertson

Co-directors Lucky McKee (*May*, *The Woman*) and Chris Silvertson (*The Lost*) resurrect their 2001 no-budget college video project, recalibrating it into a still low budget but slick horror comedy that embraces gore and feminism in equal doses. The film revolves around a quartet of hot cheerleaders brought back from the dead by a gothy witch when their football-playing beaux wipe them out in a car crash after their leader is humiliated by his ex. This is a zombie film, but co-writers McKee and Silvertson steer clear of clichés, instead poking fun at the stupidity of lusty adolescents and exposing the callousness of male privilege – all while keeping the body count high. The final-frame sequel hint comes as a welcome surprise. **SP**

BLUE RUIN (USA) Jeremy Saulnier

After debuting with the decent horror comedy *Murder Party*, writer/director Jeremy Saulnier returns guns blazing. *Blue Ruin* is a nasty, blood-soaked little revenge tale and the kind of movie that tends to jump-start a career. The story is simple, but Saulnier nimbly avoids clichés by doling out information so subtly and slowly that most of the major mysteries remain until the closing scene. Filled with quirky character humour, gory bursts of intense violence, and surprisingly heartfelt performances, *Blue Ruin* is a memorable no-budget thriller along the lines of *Blood Simple* that messes with its audience's mind long after the credits have rolled. Hopefully it won't be another six years between projects for Saulnier. **PB**



A FIELD IN ENGLAND (UK) Ben Wheatley

Is it a complex metaphor about English history or a hallucinogenic historical horror trip? Perhaps both. The director of *Kill List* and *Sightseers* delivers a low-budget, black and white piece about a handful of soldiers meeting up with a malevolent sorcerer-type after deserting during the English Civil War in the mid-1700s. The encounter, which takes place in a field (duh!), involves magic mushrooms, a buried treasure and some nasty, gory, Wheatley-style violence. Not much else happens in this bizarre little film, but it's chock full of ambitious, weird cinematography (he talked extensively about experimenting with various lenses during the post-screening Q&A), courtesy of one of Britain's most fascinating and skilled directors. **DA**





THE GREEN INFERNO

(USA/Chile)

Eli Roth

College freshman Justine is so bored with her academic career in New York that she joins an activist collective and follows them into the jungles of Peru. There, the group stages a stunt intended to bring awareness to the destruction caused by industrialism, and though the mission is a success, their plane crashes on the way back out. From out of the lush greenery emerges a tribe that imprisons the students, butchering the kids in imaginative and disgusting ways. Roth, returning to the director's chair after a six-year absence, is in positively Rothian form. That is to say, the first 40 minutes play like a teen comedy, complete with questionable acting and even more suspect writing. But survive the opener and be treated to some of the wettest, wildest cannibal action since Umberto Lenzi's *Cannibal Ferox*. **TZ**

HORNS (USA/Canada)

Alexandre Aja

Daniel Radcliffe turns in a powerhouse performance as a troubled, grief-stricken young man, Ig, who stands accused of murdering his girlfriend. Already the town pariah and constantly tailed by bottom-feeding reporters, things only get more surreal for Ig when he wakes up one morning to find a pair of horns sprouting from his head — which he soon realizes cause people to unwittingly confess all their deepest thoughts and secrets to him. Deciding to use this newfound ability to uncover the *real* murderer, Ig not only takes some well-deserved revenge on his tormenters but quickly discovers that no one in his life is quite who they've led him to believe they are. A frightfully original and surprisingly moving entry adapted from Joe Hill's best-selling novel. **MSK**



JODOROWSKY'S DUNE (USA)

Frank Pavich

In this buzz-worthy doc, Alejandro Jodorowsky guides us through the history of his proposed adaptation of Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Following the success of *The Holy Mountain* (1973), he had huge ambitions for his next project and called upon the talents of Mick Jagger, Orson Welles, H.R. Giger, Salvador Dali, Dan O'Bannon and Pink Floyd, with the project storyboarded by comics legend Mobius. Unfortunately, the French producer could not convince an American studio to support the epic, so *Dune* slipped into mythology as one of the greatest films never made. As the doc illustrates however, the production designs influenced many other films, including *Alien* (1979), which continued the collaboration between O'Bannon and Giger. So while his mystical cinematic vision never saw the light of day, its legacy lives on. **SFA**



OCULUS (USA)

Mike Flanagan

Mike Flanagan's last feature, *Absentia* (2011), was a masterful study in low-budget dread, and he brings the same sense of creeping paranoia to his follow-up, *Oculus*. Expanded from his award-winning 2006 short film, it stars *Doctor Who*'s Karen Gillan as Kaylie, a woman whose younger brother, Tim (Brenton Thwaites), was imprisoned for causing their parents' deaths years earlier. But Kaylie is convinced that the culprit is actually an old mirror that may be a portal of evil itself, and brings Tim home to prove it. The film's power comes from strong performances and Flanagan's masterful editing, which cuts between current events and what actually happened to the kids as the mirror makes its malevolence known.

There is bloodshed, yes, but expect a few tears, too, in this effective creeper. **SP**

ONLY LOVERS LEFT ALIVE

(USA)

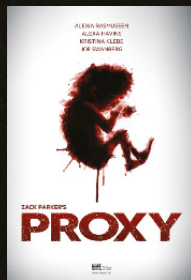
Jim Jarmusch

Only Lovers Left Alive is not a horror movie. But it is one of the best vampire films ever made. Jim Jarmusch's stylish indie art flick ruminates on the banalities of nocturnal living (you hate talking to airline reservations people? Try booking transatlantic flights that only go at night), the eternal allure of rock 'n' roll and the ecstasy of drinking blood from a chalice. Tilda Swinton is cool as all get-out as Eve, prowling the back allies of Tangiers or lazing about on silk beds; Tom Middleton is her moody Adam, hiding out in Detroit, collecting and playing vintage guitars. Running gags about the couple's famous dead poet friends run a bit thin after a while but it's a romantic journey, with a bold non-ending. A must-see for serious vamp fans. **LL**

PROXY (USA)

Zack Parker

Sometimes an absolutely crazy story can carry a film, and *Proxy* is one of them. Lacking directorial style, save for a couple of exceptional super-slow-motion gore sequences, suffering from some amateur supporting cast performances and terribly (over-)lit, the nasty Hitchcock-off-the-rails plot saves this low-budget thriller. It begins with a very pregnant woman being attacked with a brick and losing her baby. A introverted loner, she joins a support group, where she meets a woman who claims to have lost her own child. One very tragic and another exceptionally violent act later (plus a wonderfully angry performance from actor/filmmaker Joe Swanberg) and the plot twists in some delightfully insane directions, culminating in more bloody violence. Ol' Alfred would be both appalled and delighted by this sick little number. **DA**



RIGOR MORTIS (China)

Juno Mak

If you've seen the 1980s horror comedy *Mr. Vampire*, you will be familiar with the Chinese hopping vampire, a creature much different from Dracula and his descendants.

Rigor Mortis pays tribute to that classic film as well as other Asian genre baddies with its story of a sad old movie star who tries to kill himself in a creepy rundown apartment — when he fails, we discover the building has issues of its own. The visuals are, in a word, stunning, and in his ghost sisters, first-time director Mak has created two of the freakiest characters to appear at this year's festival. Beware of the confusing plot, though, which may try the patience of viewers unfamiliar with Eastern monsters and mythology in this slow-burn supernatural tale. **LL**

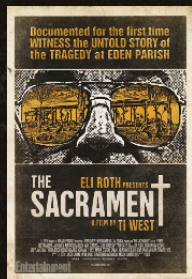


Global Threats: (from top) Katee Sackhoff in *Oculus*, Daniel Radcliffe in *Horns*, Kirby Bliss Banton in *The Green Inferno*, and (opposite) Siu-hou Chin in *Rigor Mortis*.

THE SACRAMENT (USA)

Ti West

In the hands of Ti West, this modern-day found-footage take on the 1978 Jonestown Massacre turned out to be one of the most chilling films of this year's festival. The



conceit has a three-man documentary film crew sent to visit the sister of one of the men at a religious compound located in a secret African location. Everything is sunshine and roses until some of the residents plead for help; it seems that their sinister leader, Father, would rather murder his flock than lose it. Tense, sickening and surreal,

this is true religious horror mixed with edge-of-your-seat terror. Gene Jones is absolutely chilling as Father, and, oddly, after *Proxy*, this is the second film at the fest featuring Joe Swanberg and graphic child murder! DA



SAPI (Philippines)

Brillante Ma Mendoza

A group of gumshoe news reporters catch an exorcism on camera and soon start experiencing their own personal hauntings with apocalyptic underpinnings – sounds like an ideal set-up for some found-footage Asian horror, right? Well, not so much. Brillante Ma Mendoza's film is improbably dull with a greater focus on ham-fisted media satire than any of the juicy genre elements. Towards the end, a few genuinely disturbing images pop up (with one particularly memorable moment involving a massive snake and a lady's, er, bathroom area), but by then the avalanche of indistinguishable characters, molasses-paced plotting and tepid jump scares has ruined any chance of the film making much of an impact. PB

THE STATION (Austria)

Marvin Kren

The producers of *The Station* should have consulted their German neighbours – those masters of engineering and efficiency – to help them craft more convincing practical monster effects. Instead, this obvious riff on *The Thing* gives us some subpar puppetish critters that take away from this otherwise tense creature feature. As a government official is about to visit the Station 13 research centre, the two men, one woman and dog there discover a new form of life in a melting glacier. It's some sort of infectious thing that can mix the DNA of animals to create hybrids such as giant fox-woodlouse whatnots.

Gross body horror ensues, with some neat monsters, but they don't always move convincingly. Also, where did that random girl in shorts and tank top show up from? That plot has some 'splainin' to do. DA

THE STRANGE COLOUR OF YOUR BODY'S TEARS

(Belgium/France/Luxembourg)

Helene Cattet and Bruno Forzani

Helene Cattet and Bruno Forzani's work is a unique synthesis of styles, or rather, a unique marriage (they're husband and wife) with each filmmaker approaching the medium from a differing set of core influences. Their latest effort is beautiful but bewildering, an experimental film funnelled through the aesthetics of the Italian giallo. Admittedly, that describes much of their work but this is less accessible than even their debut feature *Amer*. In a postmodern variation of a standard giallo-style plot, a man's wife goes missing, there's an investigation and black-gloved killings ensue. From here, it unravels within a labyrinthine narrative that requires multiple viewings to decipher. Fortunately though, *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears* is gorgeous and hypnotic enough to demand another viddy. SFA



WHY DON'T YOU PLAY IN HELL? (Japan)

Sion Sono

Suicide Club director Sion Sono's latest effort claimed the People's Choice Award at Midnight Madness this year and it's easy to see why. It's a film as artistically ambitious and batshit insane as it is gag-inducingly gory. The story follows a group of renegade teen filmmakers, named The Fuck Bombers, and a collection of Yakuza over the course of a decade before culminating in a decapitation-packed battle royale with cameras rolling. It's Sono's love letter to indie filmmaking and hits on all of his strengths, from surrealism, to twisted comedy, to meta-moviemaking, to good old-fashioned geysers of blood. It's difficult to even think of another movie comparable to *Why Don't You Play in Hell?*, and until Sono makes his next feature, there won't be anything like it again. PB



UNDER THE SKIN (UK)

Jonathan Glazer

British director Jonathan Glazer (*Sexy Beast*) dives into genre film territory with a magnificently photographed piece starring Scarlett Johansson as an alien. With Glazer's lens obsessively fixed on her, the mysterious Laura, drives restlessly through the Scottish Highlands looking to pick up random stragglers. Sounds incredible – but a night with her will make you disappear. She's a sexual predator whose designs on her victims lie so far beyond the realm of rational understanding that Glazer can only capture them in abstract terms. Deliberately paced, at times monotonous, *Under the Skin* is a master class in mood and atmosphere that consistently erupts into fantastical, otherworldly strangeness. Like its leading lady, this is one of the rare instances where "mesmerizing" can be applied without hyperbole. SFA



WITCHING AND BITCHING

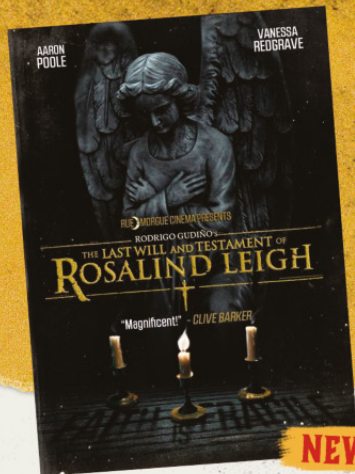
(Spain)

Álex de la Iglesia

A pack of mascots (including Silver Jesus, his preteen son, a toy soldier, Minnie Mouse and Spongebob Squarepants) stage a brazen daytime robbery in downtown Madrid and take off through rural Spain. They end up in Zugarramurdi – a real-life town with a history of black magic – in the company of a



Only The Wicked: (from top) Scarlett Johansson in *Under the Skin*, Gen Hoshino in *Why Don't You Play In Hell?*, and the black magic women of *Witching and Bitching*.



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ROB KUHN'S **BIRTH OF THE LIVING DEAD** DOCUMENTARY TRACES
THE EXPLOSION OF ZOMBIE CULTURE BACK TO ITS ROMERO ROOTS

THE GHOULS OF

'68
by
TAL ZIMMERMAN

A S THE '60s WERE COMING TO A CLOSE, AMERICAN CULTURE WAS CHANGING AT A BRISK PACE.

It was clear that the high hopes of the Love Generation were failing to manifest. In 1968, the Vietnam War was steadily intensifying, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, both figures who symbolized progress, were assassinated, and riots and protests erupted across the country. It was bad news all around and proved to be a sour time in a decade that had promised to be so sweet. This was fertile ground for the birth of the living dead.

Twenty-seven-year-old George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* first shambled onto screens in October of that year. The film didn't shake too many branches and was generally dismissed, as it was marketed as another low-budget exploitation picture more suited to drive-ins than high-minded discussions. Then something changed. News began to spread globally of a film so disturbing that it had to be seen to be believed. It was marked with graphic cannibalism, matricide and an open distrust of authority. But it also had brains. Loads of brains. Cleverly hidden in the shuffling corpse of a B-movie was thought-provoking social commentary that changed the course of cinema forever and put an indie director of TV commercials and *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* segments on the map.

"I first saw *Night of the Living Dead* at a midnight show in 1983," says Rob Kuhns, writer/director of the new Glass Eye Pix documentary *Birth of the Living Dead*, from his headquarters in Brooklyn. "I remember leaving the theatre feeling shattered and dazed. Of the thousands of movies I've seen in my lifetime, only a handful have hit me on that primal, gut level."

Then a film student at NYU, he became an instant admirer of Romero. Ingesting everything the director had to offer, Kuhns gradually forged a career in TV and film documentaries, a field that goes a long way to inform the journalistic tone of *Birth* (originally titled *Year of the Dead*). He knew that to serve

the story in a way that had not been done before, he would have to go deeper than the usual talking heads and explore the social climate of the day. Kuhns cites his employment under Bill Moyers, a former press secretary to Lyndon B. Johnson who became a TV doc presenter, as his breakthrough moment.

"I would never have expected my work with Moyers to have anything to do with the story of *Night of the Living Dead*, but once I started this job, I'd have to be blind not to see the connection," Kuhns explains. "He did a show about the Kerner Report, an LBJ initiative, which examined the causes of the

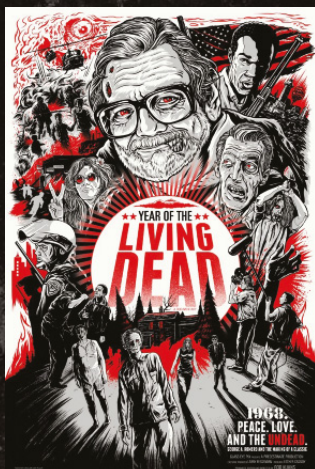
race rebellions in 1967, the same year that *Night* was shot. I was stunned by the footage of Newark and Detroit during this time. It looked like the apocalypse. We did another show about LBJ grappling with Vietnam, escalating the war at a time when the country was deeply divided about our involvement. I experimented in weaving these stories chronologically with the stories of the making of *Night* and it hit me like a ton of bricks — this tiny, low-budget horror film made in Pittsburgh by a bunch of young, first-time filmmakers was, in fact, a living document of its moment in history. The documentary had developed a life of its own. It was just a matter of following the bread crumbs."

Birth's interview subjects are top-notch and diverse, and bolstered by animated graphics taken from art done by our own Gary Pullin (who also created the film's poster). In addition to Romero, there are words from *Pictures at a Revolution* author Mark Harris, genrephile film critic Elvis

Mitchell and Hollywood heavyweight producer Gale Anne Hurd. Each makes a case that *Night* sits among the most important films ever made, and that it offers one of the more honest political statements in a highly turbulent decade of American history.

"Each interview turned up more wonderful surprises, which made editing an absolute joy," beams Kuhns. "It's a great thrill when a project develops a life of its own and takes you in directions you would never have anticipated."

NYC residents can check out *Birth* at the IFC Center starting November 6. Keep your eyes on the film's Facebook page for future releases. 🧟



MEMENTO MORGUE



RM France's Fabien Delage and Simon Pegg at the Festival International du Film Fantastique de Gérardmer.



(Top to bottom) Edmonton FoF guests Sarah Wayne Callies with RM's Monica S. Kuebler, Ron Perlman and RM's Dave Alexander, Julian Richings during his panel, and (right) Monica and Kat Von Pire at the RM booth.



Caroline Munro hangs out with RM UK's Richard Gladman.



Nothing Left to Fear director Anthony Leonardi and producer Slash stop by the Rue Morgue Manor.



Witching and Bitching director Álex de la Iglesia and Midnight Madness programmer Colin Geddes at the film's Toronto International Film Festival premiere.

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CINEMACABRE

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FRIENDS 'TIL THE END

CURSE OF CHUCKY

Starring Fiona Dourif, Brad Dourif and Danielle Bisutti
Written and directed by Don Mancini
Universal

It's goddamn difficult to keep a horror franchise frightening when you're six movies in. It's even tougher when it's a product of the 1980s that's full of goofy one-liners. And it would seem to be damn near impossible when that franchise is centred around a killer doll. But Chucky's a survivor, and with the help of Don Mancini — who created the series and has had a hand writing and/or directing and/or producing each installment over the last 25 years — the little red-haired bastard is in top murderous form in *Curse of Chucky*.

This time the doll arrives via courier to a cavernous, *Psycho*-like mansion owned by a woman and her wheelchair-bound daughter, Nica (Fiona Dourif, daughter of Brad Dourif). After the mom seemingly commits suicide by taking a dive from the second floor, the daughter is paid a consoling visit by her sister, brother-in-law, young niece, their attractive nanny and a priest. The little girl takes a shine to Chucky, who makes the most of the opportunity to

pick off the houseguests one by one. Brad Dourif returns as both the voice of Chucky and his pre-doll human incarnation, occult serial killer Charles Lee Ray. In a series of flashbacks, we learn of Ray's connection to the family and why he's after Nica. As a storm traps her in the house, she must confront the tiny terror. Bum legs and lots of stairs raise the stakes considerably when the house elevator conks out.

Mancini cleverly adds to the series' mythology while seamlessly tying in the new characters and bringing back some familiar faces in surprise cameos.

And he actually makes the doll frightening again, often just by training his camera on its face as we wait for it to snap alive and attack. The effects are top notch, as well, with plenty of skilled puppeteering being used over CGI, and some ambitious gore gags. This unrated Blu-ray/DVD combo delivers some particularly gruesome kills, and the extras provide the expected behind-the-scenes goodies, as well as featurettes contextualizing this entry in the long-running series.

Curse of Chucky is a well-acted, effectively told, technically tight horror tale with a lot of care put into it. Some toys are just built to last.

DAVE ALEXANDER



ALL THE CRETINS OF THE NIGHT

ARGENTO'S DRACULA 3D

Starring Thomas Kretschmann, Asia Argento and Rutger Hauer
Directed by Dario Argento
Written by Dario Argento, Enrique Cerezo, Stefano Piani, et al.
IFC Midnight

Let me set the scene for you. It's Walpurgis Night, and two lovers meet for a secret rendezvous in a secluded barn. As the woman walks home from her tryst, she's followed by a mysterious shadow and attacked, becoming the first victim of Dracula (Thomas Kretschmann). The rest unfolds as if Stoker's tale had been chewed, swallowed and vomited up in 3-D by a preying mantis (wait for it...).

Yet the whole gang is here! Jonathan Harker (Unax Ugalde) travels to the Carpathians to work for Dracula and is tormented by his undead bride. Lucy (Asia Argento) falls prey to the Count's charm and briefly joins him in undeath. Mina (Marta Gastini) worries over her hubby's disappearance, confronts Dracula, discovers she's the reincarnation of his dead wife, falls under



his spell and kills him, duh. And, of course, Van Helsing (Rutger Hauer) shows up to save the day... but not the film.

Italian horror maestro Dario Argento has an early body of work that immerses you in unconventional plots, eye-popping cinematography, gore, suspense and jarring soundtracks. None of that went into *Argento's Dracula 3D*. The set design is ripped straight from a 1960s Hammer film and lit like a daytime soap opera. Just how many 10k lights does it take to light a night forest scene? All of them, apparently.

With little to work with, the cast give awkward, wooden performances laced with painful dialogue, leaving Hauer absolutely wasted in his role as vamp slayer. While the film has its fair share of blood and visual effects, the CGI would've been considered sub-par two decades ago, and features possibly the worst wolf-to-man transition ever computed. And, naturally, the Count turns into a giant preying mantis to bite the head off one of his victims. He's also an owl. WTF?

If it sounds ludicrous, that's because it is, but not ludicrous enough to muster more than the occasional chuckle. *Argento's Dracula 3D* adds nothing to the canon of horror's favourite Count and it screams of cheapo direct-to-DVD junk rather than 3-D spectacle. On the plus side, there are Asia Argento's boobs... until you remember her father was directing. Well, at least he got that mantis in!

KAT VON PIRE

MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS

DEVIL'S PASS

Starring Gemma Atkinson, Richard Reid and Matt Stokoe
Directed by Renny Harlin
Written by Vikram Weet
IFC Midnight

It's been a long road down for Renny Harlin. After working his way up from low-budget genre movies to directing A-level action flicks in the '90s, he's back where he started in Indieland with, of all things, a found-footage horror flick.

The story riffs on the Dyatlov Pass Incident, an unsolved mystery from 1959 in which a group of young Russian skiers went missing in the mountains; their tents were discovered ripped open from the inside and their half-naked bodies exhibited a number of peculiar injuries, including a missing tongue. To this day, conspiracy theories about the case abound, ranging from good old mountain madness to yetis(!).

Harlin's take on the material falls firmly on the silly side as it follows a collection of young 'n' pretty adventurers and film students determined to walk the path of the Dyatlov victims in order to solve the mystery of their grisly deaths once and for all. All found-footage clichés are in play, such as impossibly captured sequences, constant bickering over shooting, wooden characterization and heaps of jump-scares. For the first 45 minutes, Harlin plays things surprisingly small, considering he directed *Cliffhanger*, and, despite some dull and interchangeable protagonists,



tension and suspense build up effectively enough to suggest he suddenly discovered subtlety almost 30 years into his career. Then an underground bunker is discovered – and the movie shifts into crazy.

Avalanches, aliens, time travel, teleportation, Russian government assassins – no idea was deemed too dumb for the clusterfuck finale of *Devil's Pass*. The CGI is bad and the mythology is worse, yet you can't help but be slightly impressed by just how insane things get. This isn't a good movie, but it is a wild and memorable ride that will leave audiences slack-jawed in disbelief. Harlin certainly goes for it and you've got to admire his balls, if not his brains.

PHIL BROWN

HIDE AND GO SHRIEK

HIDDEN IN THE WOODS

Starring Siboney Lo, Daniel Antvilo and Carolina Escobar
Directed by Patricio Valladares
Written by Andrea Cavaletto and Patricio Valladares
Artsploitation

Ever seen a movie where an inbred freak lives deep in the woods, isolated from the rest of the world except for cannibalistic family members? Sure you have. Now imagine that this family and the animalistic freak are the good guys, and you have the gist of Patricio Valladares' neo-sleazoid shock flick. Unfortunately, this moral reversal is one of the chief points of interest in a narrative that's often far too familiar.

The bad guys, in case you were wondering, are a bunch of drug dealers. They're hunting a couple of nubile sisters and their, um, brother because their imprisoned dad was a supplier, and getting hold of his stash is now the crooks' prime objective. Oh, wait – the dad is definitely a bad guy, too, as would be anyone who forces himself on his own daughters, who consequently dub him the "Boogeyman." This simple plot, said to be inspired by true events, suggests just how primal things get.

As genre touchstones go, think a dash of the *Wrong Turn* series supplemented by both versions of *We Are What We Are*: the Jorge Michel Grau original in terms of its emphasis on messed-up young 'uns trying to

deal with the real world without much parental guidance, and the Jim Mickle remake insofar as its incestual subtext is loud and clear.

In fact, it's this sort of all-out commitment to exploitation content that distinguishes *Hidden in the Woods*. The gore, largely blood sprays and scattered animal parts à la H.G. Lewis, mostly disappoints, as does the violence, which almost always has impact/penetration just out of frame. Neither frightening nor especially suspenseful, *Hidden in the Woods* manages to succeed due to its nasty, down-market – and therefore "sincere" – tone. All in all, its art lies in its lack of studied artfulness, and for that reason it's understandable if some dismiss it out of hand. To do so, though, ignores the surprising poetry of the coda. Then again, Valladares himself frequently seems to ignore what he's capable of, and the potential power of the story he's telling.

PETER GUTIERREZ

MESSING WITH TEXAS

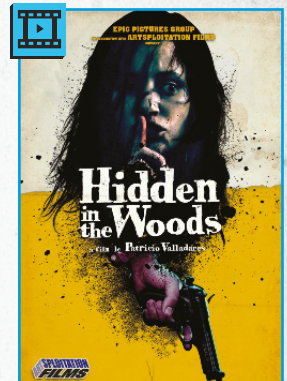
BUTCHER BOYS

Starring Ali Faulkner, Johnny Walter and Derek Lee Nixon
Directed by Duane Graves and Justin Meeks
Written by Kim Henkel
Phase 4 Films

Jonathan Swift's 1729 pamphlet titled "A Modest Proposal" famously advocated that the children of the poor should be systematically fattened in order to feed the rich. By the dystopian author's caustic rationale, this "innocent, cheap, easy and effectual" measure would prevent them "from being a Burden to their Parents and Country." Flash forward 383 years and Swift's ironic masterpiece remains one of literature's most ferocious political satires and serves as the direct inspiration for *Butcher Boys*, an insipid tale of crazed cannibalism from writer/producer Kim Henkel, co-creator of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974).



Hidden In The Woods





No One Lives

Formerly known as *Boneboys* and originally conceived as a sequel to Tobe Hooper's sacrosanct classic, *Butcher Boys* follows the fate of Sissy (Ali Faulkner) and her three teenage friends who encounter a pack of snarling inner-city cannibals whilst travelling home from a swanky restaurant. Abducted



by the gang, Sissy is brought to their subterranean lair and subjected to a series of medical tests (including a gratuitous gynaecological examination). She soon learns that the disparate band of degenerates are part of an underground organization that caters human meat – or “junk” as it's labelled due to its seemingly addictive properties – for an exclusive clientele. Escaping from her captors (and the menu), Sissy flees into the labyrinthine corridors of their hideout hoping to survive long enough to find a way out.

Despite its penchant for literary allusion, Henkel's hollow script holds scant satirical weight and quickly descends into little more than an extended chase sequence. Trading *Chainsaw's* expansive rustic vistas for the desolate urban decay of something like the original *Assault on Precinct 13*, *Butcher Boys* occasionally feels like a stammering composite of those two vastly superior works. Its best moments are tired regurgitations of *TCM's* greatest hits (the dinner scene, the climactic road pursuit) and all attempts to recapture that same air of raw, unfettered intensity are napalmed by some overcooked performances pitched uncomfortably close to caricature. Add to this a sprinkling of pointless cameos from *Chainsaw* alumni, some choppy editing and generous portions of cringe-worthy dialogue (one female victim informs the advancing cannibals that are about to literally tear strips off her, “I would've given you all blowjobs but forget it!”) and *Butcher Boys* leaves a bad aftertaste.

MICHAEL DOYLE

DOESN'T CUT BOTH WAYS

NO ONE LIVES

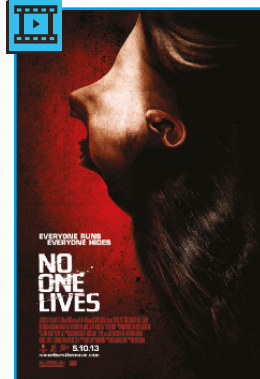
Starring Luke Evans, Lindsey Shaw and Adelaide Clemens
Directed by Ryuhei Kitamura
Written by David Cohen
Anchor Bay

Mindless bloodbath or psychological thriller? *No One Lives*, which made a splash at its 2012 Toronto International Film Festival debut with its shocking gore, can't seem to decide. And that's the problem with Ryuhei Kitamura's follow up to his impressive American debut, *Midnight Meat Train* (2008) – it misses the mark on both fronts by aiming for the middle.

After a college dorm party ends in a massacre, Emma (Adelaide Clemens) goes missing and her parents offer up a hefty reward for her return. When a pack of small-time crooks led by Hoag (Lee Tergeson) find the young woman, they think their estate-robbing days are over, but it turns out that she's being pursued by a force far more sinister than they're prepared to defend against. Luke Evans plays our main protagonist, who remains unnamed throughout the film, and who appears to have an expansive background in military tactics, hand-to-hand combat and booby traps. The precision and calm of his brutality is off-putting, and he doesn't hold back as he hacks through anyone who would stand between himself and his prize. The body count rises as his dark and complex relationship with Emma unfolds, and as the title suggests, he's not inclined toward mercy.

I'll applaud a solid performance by an oddly charismatic Evans, who mouths his terrible lines with more deadpan seriousness than they deserve, but the wince-worthy dialogue and overreliance on hysterical characters really hurts the otherwise gratifying and creative practical effects (including a skin-suit sequence that will make your jaw drop).

No One Lives is very much an action-horror movie,



and the featurette in the Blu-ray combo pack serves to further reinforce the fact that the special-effects makeup and gore scenes took most of the filmmaker and crew's focus. It's a shame, though, because the movie touches upon some deeply unsettling themes embedded in the twisted relationship between Emma and her captor, which could have significantly changed it for the better if given more attention and development. As it stands, this one's a frustrating film that reaches in all the right directions but can't get anything firmly in its grasp.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

ALYCE KILLS

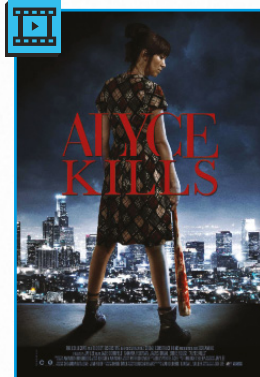
Starring Jade Dornfeld, Eddie Rouse and James Duval
Written and directed by Jay Lee
Bloody Disgusting

Horror films seem to be getting arty again. Movies such as *Donkey Punch*, *Trigger Man* and *The Battery*, for example, use a realistic aesthetic that is more common to John Cassavetes than John Carpenter, but it makes for engrossing and believable horror. With the addition of so many more ideas and styles to the genre vernacular, though, it's easier than ever to lose your focus when trying to add flare. *Alyce Kills*, which presents some slick and scary scenes, exemplifies the problem.

A year after an awkward falling out, BFFs Carroll (Tamara Feldman) and Alyce (Jade Dornfeld) reunite for an all-out, drugged-up soiree. When they end up on the roof of Alyce's apartment complex, things get rowdy and Alyce accidentally pushes Carroll off the edge. Instead of facing the consequences, she flees the scene to hide in her apartment. With Carroll still alive but in critical condition, Alyce claims she had no involvement in the incident and proceeds to slip into guilt-wracked madness. Along the way, she delves deeper into hard drugs, begins a loathsome sexual relationship with a drug dealer, neglects her responsibilities and has a series of drug-fuelled freak outs. Her insanity finally comes to a head in a Travis Bickle-like way, resulting in a ludicrously gory third act.

Alyce Kills draws you in immediately with its uneasy, realistic style, which falls somewhere between documentary and mumblecore. Despite its depravity, though, the film really drags in the middle. Watching the title character's slow descent into delirium is pretty daunting: she just futzes around here and there in drug-addled devastation, until the film suddenly shifts from stark realism to dreamlike dark comedy for the final, gruesome half hour.

Although visually stunning and well acted (most no-



tably Eddie Rouse, who plays the drug dealer), the beginning and end feel as if they're from two different movies, and the central slump does little to aid the plot transition. Instead of a coherent whole, *Alyce Kills* just feels more like a collection of creepy clips. It's not the kind of slaughterhouse art house this reviewer's been hoping for.

PATRICK DOLAN

BLOOD 'N' GUTS

THE VAMPIRE DIARIES: THE COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON

Starring Nina Dobrev, Paul Wesley and Ian Somerhalder
Directed by Chris Grismer, Rob Hardy, Lance Anderson, Joshua Butler, et al.
Written by Caroline Dries, Jose Molina, Julie Plec, Brian Young, et al.
Warner Home Video

The Vampire Diaries is one of the ballsiest shows on network television. If that statement threatens to make your head explode, get a firm grip on your cranium, because I'm about to explain everything.

For three seasons the series traded extensively on the mortality of its human heroine Elena (Nina Dobrev), whom the supernatural beasts routinely either tried to kill off or protect. As various secondary characters died (something that happens with startling frequency) or became monsters themselves, this core equilibrium between the two vampire brothers and the fragile teenage girl they lusted over was maintained. Being American TV, this status quo could have lasted the series' entire run, but at the end of season three the showrunners pulled the rug out by killing Elena and turning her into a bloodsucker. And unlike most series, which would use such a device for the finale, then find a way to hit the reset switch two or three episodes into the new season, Elena's vampdom became the new world order. "We wanted to show the cautionary tale attached to vampirism; it's not wish fulfillment, it's a curse," explains writer Julie Plec in the set's extras.

Guided by this structural rework, season four is driven by Elena's transition. As she struggles to come to terms with the heightened emotional pain that being a vampire brings to her life, her friends attempt to chase down an ancient, purported cure in hopes of restoring her humanity (which, interestingly, is the last thing she wants). As the season progresses, Elena switches off her human emotions, the werewolf-vampire hybrids return, and an ancient evil seeks to tear open the divide between the living and the dead. Yes, *The Vampire Diaries* packs a lot of plot into 23 episodes.

Unfortunately the same isn't true for the DVD extras, which offer zero commentaries, just six brief making-of fea-

turettes (including the completely throwaway "Blood, Boys, and Bad Behavior"). The discs are rounded out with bloopers, deleted scenes, a fan art gallery and a super maudlin fan-made video. While the bonus features are weak, any show with the guts to turn its heroine into blood-drinker is definitely not. Tune in.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE WALKS ONE OFF IN THE WOODS

DAMPER ON THE CAMPERS

THE LEGEND OF THE PSYCHOTIC FOREST RANGER

Paranoid Brunette

I'd rather be entertained by a bunch of nobody actors with a goofy script spouting cheesy dialogue and getting sprayed with fake blood than watch them frantically trying to become the next *Blair Witch Project*. That's exactly the case with this righteous throwback to the '80s that follows a group of friends who head out to the woods to drink beer, smoke pot and try to get laid. All the bodacious babes and gnarly guys prove to be no match for the titular bad guy who slices them up with everything from an axe to a set of keys. If you remember the '80s then you'll know what I mean when I say that

this movie is tubular, dude. Like, to the max!

BODY COUNT: 12

ACTUAL TIME SPENT IN THE WOODS: 38 minutes and 4 seconds



GIVE IT A PASSQUATCH

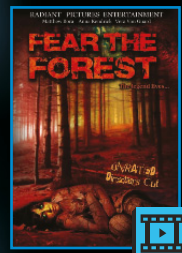
FEAR THE FOREST

Next Wave Distribution

On the other hand, some movies desperately try to be serious works of art but instead end up being serious celluloid shiteests. *Fear the Forest's* hapless campers wander into some woods rumoured to be a cursed Indian hunting ground infested with sasquatches. Turns out that it also happens to be teeming with enough bounty hunters, serial killers and redneck rapists to spoil any weekend trip — guaranteed. Though the twist at the end of the film is kind of neat, it's sunk by continuity errors, lousy image and sound quality, and a flashback to a Native American hunting party that's almost too embarrassing to watch. If Bigfoot is real, he's probably on the phone right now with his lawyers, trying to stop the distribution of this film.

BODY COUNT: 12

ACTUAL TIME SPENT IN THE WOODS: 53 minutes and 23 seconds



PHANTOM POWER

LAST KIND WORDS

RLJ Entertainment

Definitely the most polished and professional of these three arboreal offerings, *Last Kind Words* is one of those movies you might overlook if you saw it on a rental shelf (whatever that is...), but I'm urging you to give it a try. Eli's a teen who's been uprooted by his parents and forced to work on a farm. Lonely and misunderstood, he spends most of his time hanging out in the nearby forest, where he meets a strange girl and has supernatural visions. Though it's utterly depressing at times, it still rings true as a sweet ghost story that's incredibly beautiful. The small cast, including Brad Dourif, (*Child's Play*), Marianne Hagan (*Stakeland*) and up-and-coming Canadian siren Alexia Fast (*Fido*), gives solid heartstring-tugging performances. Ouch!

BODY COUNT: 8

ACTUAL TIME SPENT IN THE WOODS: 32 minutes and 6 seconds



LAST CHANCE LANCE

PET ISSUES



DIE ANOTHER DAY

DAY OF THE DEAD (1985) Blu-ray/DVD

Starring Joseph Pilato, Richard Liberty and Lori Cardille
Written and directed by George A. Romero
Scream Factory

It was, and still is, the darkest day in horror. Now, George A. Romero's splatter masterpiece *Day of the Dead* rises again in its second domestic Blu-ray release, this time courtesy of Scream Factory. Here's why it needs to be on your shelf...

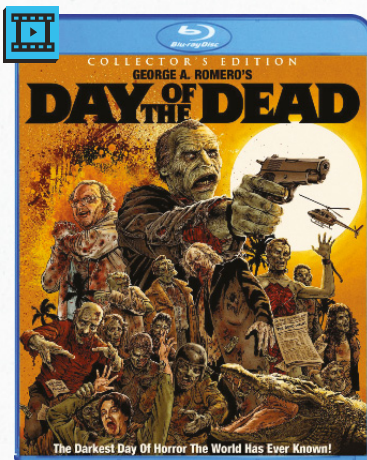
In case you have been living in a great, big fourteen-mile tombstone, *Day* portrays humanity's last survivors of a global zombie apocalypse in a race against time to find a remedy for the ever-worsening threat of extinction. It's in an underground missile base that a team of scientists, technicians and military personnel battle the living dead (and each other) as the mass of shambling corpses outside of their compound grows. The atmosphere is oppressive, Tom Savini's gore effects are as good as it gets (many, including the legendary artist himself, consider it to be his greatest achievement) and the script, though

thick with heightened melodrama, is engaging start to finish. It may have lost the zombie race of 1985 (behind *Return of the Living Dead* and *Re-Animator*), but *Day* has more to do with why zombies are popular today than either of those films.

Scream's new Blu-ray set is very good. The print is crisp and clean, with the already incredible makeup effects holding ground under such fine-tuning (unlike other hi-def scrub jobs). The green-grey-red colour palette is more vivid than ever, while shadows and darkness retain necessary depth. The all-new documentary *World's End: The Legacy of Day of the Dead* is the disc's clincher, though. Featuring interviews with most of the cast and several crew, the 86-minute extra gives us a heartfelt look back at the impact of the film on those who made it.

And proving that *Day* is Romero's most quotable movie, we finish with a reel of cast members delivering their favourite lines. Hilarious. Unquestionably worth the upgrade, blowing the piss out of past versions.

TAL ZIMMERMAN



UP TO ITS TITLE?

SNUFF (1976) Blu-ray/DVD

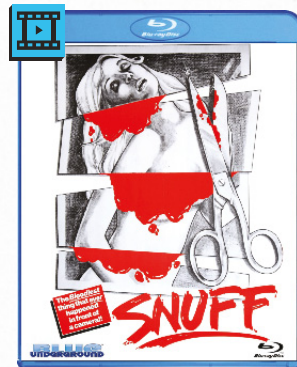
Starring Enrique Larratelli, Margarita Amuchástegui and Roberta Findlay
Written and directed by Michael and Roberta Findlay
Blue Underground

Part of the problem with being a collector is that it often puts you in the position of needing to own something worth less than the sum of its parts. Such is the case with Michael and Roberta Findlay's *Snuff*.

At face value, there's not much to recommend the film, a shoddily made piece of Manson-sploitation revolving around a Hollywood actress stalked by a drug cult in South America. Yes, there are enough beautiful women to provide the requisite eye candy, and someone gets killed every five minutes (often for no apparent reason). The sex-and-violence template wears thin rather quickly, though, and the Findlays fill out the running time with bad dialogue, bad dubbing, a "plot" in the loosest sense of the term and enough Technicolor blood to make H.G. Lewis blush. Yet *Snuff* is a must-see in spite of itself – not for the content of the picture, but for the cultural response to it.

Produced as *The Slaughter* in 1971, *Snuff* sat on the shelf for five years before distributor Allan Shackleton filmed a new ending, a proto-found-footage sequence depicting the director and crew dismembering an actress on set. Retitling the piece *Snuff*, he advertised the film as featuring a genuine death and hired "protestors" to picket theatres showing the movie, inciting a media frenzy that ended with New York District Attorney Robert Morgenthau launching a well-publicized investigation into whether the murder was staged. Shackleton laughed all the way to the bank while the imaginations of horror fans were sparked by the concept of real "snuff films." No, this wasn't the movie that invented the urban legend, but it did popularize it as a genre convention.

Perhaps counterintuitively for a film originally showcased with scratches and dust marks, *Snuff* has been digitally remastered, eliminating an aesthetic that worked in its favour. Considering Michael Findlay and Shackleton are dead, the cast were unknowns picked up on location in South America and Roberta Findlay (who also provided voice-over work) is notoriously reticent to comment on her career, there are generous extras on hand, including interviews with '70s-



era pornographer Carter Stevens (in whose studio Shackleton filmed the epilogue) and *Drive* director Nicolas Winding Refn, trailers, galleries and an essay by grindhouse scholar Alexandra Heller-Nicholas. Although by no means a classic, *Snuff* is still a landmark work of exploitation.

PRESTON FASSEL

BEELEZBLOB

PRINCE OF DARKNESS (1987) Blu-ray/DVD

Starring Donald Pleasence, Jameson Parker and Victor Wong
Written and directed by John Carpenter
Scream Factory

I have a message for you and you're definitely going to like it. John Carpenter's *Prince of Darkness*, which celebrated its 25th anniversary last year (see *RM#128*), has been given the full Blu-ray treatment for your viewing terror.

In the basement of an abandoned church, a Catholic priest (Donald Pleasence) discovers a large container of spinning green liquid, which has been kept secret for centuries. The exact contents of the container are a mystery, but it is known that something very powerful and very dark lurks within. The priest enlists the help of a local physics professor (Victor Wong) and a group of his students and colleagues to unlock its secrets. However, the green goo begins to escape the container and soon all hell breaks loose – literally! One by one the researchers fall under its influence as they are transformed into mindless slaves bent not only on serving the infernal ooze, but also bringing its sinister creator into our world.

While Carpenter's signature touch is certainly present, the film distinguishes itself by having a much slower build up that extends over the entirety of the story. It relies more on instilling a feeling of dread in the viewer than surprising with jump scares. The situation gets bleaker and bleaker for the protagonists as the supernatural elements slowly creep in. John Carpenter and Alan Howarth's pulsing score really sells the impending doom and it's all made even more unnerving in high definition.

The lone commentary track between Carpenter and actor Peter Jason provides plenty of insight into the locations, how certain effects were done and various casting decisions, as well as plenty of other little stories and tidbits that will certainly please any fan of the film. Also included are some very informative individual interviews with Carpenter, visual effects supervisor Robert Grasmere and Alice Cooper, who discusses how he went from visiting the set to playing the pos-



Prince of Darkness

sessed street schizo that we see in the film.

Prince of Darkness is requiring viewing for just about any horror buff, and this Blu-ray is perfect for any Carpenter fan with space on the shelf between *The Thing* and *In the Mouth of Madness*.

MIKE BEARDSALL

MOCK-THREE

MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE MOVIE (1996) Blu-ray

Starring Trace Beaulieu, Michael J. Nelson and Jim Mallon
Directed by Jim Mallon
Written by Joel Hodgson, Michael J. Nelson, et al.
Shout Factory

If you don't know what the acronym *MST3K* stands for, then it's possible you either weren't alive or just weren't cool back when the 1980s were turning into the 1990s. As the rest of us know, *Mystery Science Theater 3000* was a television comedy series that ran for an astounding 197 episodes from 1988 to 1999 and attained the kind of cult status normally reserved for dead rock stars and cream-filled pastries.

By 1996, the show was doing so well that it made the leap to the big screen as a feature-length movie. Universal Studios came on board and offered a bigger budget, new sets, better effects and a chance to hack away at their 1955 Technicolor classic *This Island Earth*.

The movie, like the show, is centered around a hapless janitor, launched into space by a mad sci-

entist to live on an orbiting satellite, where he's forced to watch some of the worst sci-fi and horror movies ever made. The only way the poor guy is able to maintain his sanity is by riffing on the films along with a couple of wise-ass robots he's built.

What sets this Blu-ray release apart from the film's previous 1998 and 2008 DVD releases are its amazing bonus features. Included is a making-of featurette, a whack of deleted scenes and a new 33-minute segment titled *MST3K: The Movie: The Motion Picture Odyssey* that details some of the ideas that never made it into the film, how horrible the editing process can be and just how exhausting the shoot was for the entire crew. Also included is an unexpected 36-minute treat hosted by a slew of film historians and directors such as Joe Dante (*Gremlins*, *The Howling*), who delve into the history and hardships behind making *This Island Earth* a cinematic reality.

For those who still don't know what *MST3K* is all about, this film is a pretty good primer, but you might want to go back to the very first episode and start from scratch. Oh, and welcome to Planet Earth.

LAST CHANCE LANCE

A CARPENTER AND HIS 'CRAFT

IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS (1994) Blu-ray

Starring Sam Neill, Julie Carmen and Jürgen Prochnow
Directed by John Carpenter
Written by Michael De Luca
New Line

As an arrant riposte to stuffy critics who routinely condemn horror for its supposed lack of value, *In the Mouth of Madness* is a playful celebration on the genre's enduring power. A scary, stylish flick, it failed to resonate with mid-'90s audiences who were either expecting a plasma-





Amityville Horror II: The Possession

packed creature-fest on par with *The Thing* or were confounded by the film's sardonic, self-reflexive bent.

The plot centres around insurance investigator John Trent (Sam Neill), who is hired by a publishing company to locate Sutter Cane (Jürgen Prochnow), the world's best-selling horror author (an obvious nod to the Stephen King phenomenon). Cane has vanished, along with his latest manuscript, which is rumoured to literally drive readers insane. Trent pieces together a coded

map from the lurid covers of Cane's paperbacks and discovers the town of Hobb's End. Arriving there with Linda Styles (*Fright Night 2*'s Julie Carmen), an editor keen on locating the missing novelist's newest work,

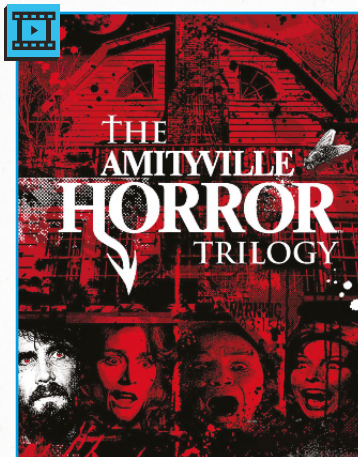
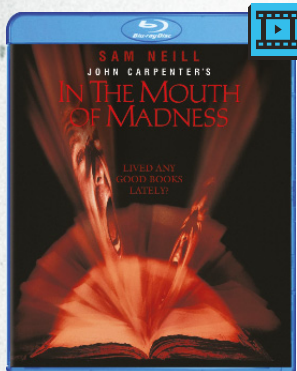
they discover that many of the locations, citizens and scenarios described in Cane's books actually exist. As Trent's reality becomes subsumed by Cane's imagination, the borders between fact and fiction become terrifyingly blurred, unleashing an ancient evil that threatens to devour the world.

Whereas *The Thing* and *Prince of Darkness*, the first two installments of Carpenter's exquisite "Apocalypse Trilogy," mooched elements from H.P. Lovecraft, *Madness* is a more overt meditation on the Providence writer's mythos. This recursive, allegorical monster movie nurtures an ominous tone from the first frame and Carpenter laces the proceedings with several well-orchestrated – if thuddingly archaic – jolts. These assist in propelling the surreal narrative towards an un-

compromising finale that disturbs despite the presence of an uningratiating central character (although Neill's performance is excellent).

The sharpness of New Line's Blu-ray will no doubt resurrect debates over whether KNB's "rubbery" creature effects lack the ferocious ingenuity of Rob Bottin's work on *The Thing*. However, both films are aesthetically divergent as the slimy, shadow-drenched monsters of *Madness* are more latent than manifest. No doubt an attempt to tamely follow Lovecraft's ethos of merely suggesting the unspeakable, this cerebral approach may not sate every horror fan, but with its rigorous technical flair and oppressive atmosphere, *Madness* remains a keeper.

MICHAEL DOYLE



SHOUT! HOUSE

THE AMITYVILLE HORROR (1979)

Starring James Brolin, Margot Kidder and Rod Steiger
Directed by Stuart Rosenberg
Written by Sandor Stern and Jay Anson
Shout! Factory

AMITYVILLE II: THE POSSESSION (1982)

Starring James Olson, Burt Young and Rutanya Alda
Directed by Damiano Damiani
Written by Tommy Lee Wallace, Hans Holzer

AMITYVILLE 3D (1983)

Starring Tony Roberts, Tess Harper and Robert Joy
Directed by Richard Fleischer
Written by William Wales

You can argue over which is the best *Amityville* film until the walls ooze blood, but with-

out a doubt the first three are the best out of the eleven sequels, remakes and rip-offs (and counting). Conveniently, all three are now available in one Blu-ray box set from Shout! Factory, in a crisp high-definition transfer.

The first installment details the supposedly true account of George and Kathy Lutz (James Brolin and Margot Kidder), after they move into 112 Ocean Avenue in Amityville, New York, thirteen months after the infamous DeFeo murders took place there. Soon, the couple and their children are tormented by demonic voices, free-flowing ooze and swarms of flies.

They escape unharmed, but *Amityville II: The Possession* tells the story of the previous owners, the DeFeos, who were not so lucky. Damiano Damiani directs a formidable prequel/sequel that portrays the events surrounding the mysterious murders committed by Ronald DeFeo, Jr. Like the Lutzes after them, the DeFeos are plagued by oozing pipes, strange voices and unexplained moving objects, and Sonny (based on Ronald Jr. and played by Jack Wagner) becomes possessed by the murderous demon.

Perhaps a product of mid-'80s 3-D fever, *Amityville 3D* drops all references to the Lutz family and instead follows a journalist who buys 112 Ocean Avenue, set on debunking the Amityville legend. Go figure: he's also plagued by supernatural events, which end up claiming his daughter. Paranormal investigators attempt to rid the house of evil and

plenty of cheesy 3-D effects ensue.

Amityville looks great on the 'ray and the practical effects translate very well. The set includes an older commentary track with famous late parapsychologist Dr. Hans Holzer, who discusses the supposedly real events behind the film, which offers up some interesting research for ghost hunters, if no real technical info. Holzer's daughter, Anne, contributes her own commentary track for *Amityville II*, filling in notes from her father's book, *Murder in Amityville*, upon which the film is based. Beyond that, fans can enjoy original theatrical trailers, an interview with cast and crew, including Damiani, as well as a short making-of featurette with stars James Brolin and Margot Kidder.

Overall this is a decent set for avid Blu-ray collectors, even if it isn't a huge upgrade from the original *Amityville Horror Collection* released in 2005. Best suited for those with a haunted house-shaped gap in their collections.

JESSA SOBCZUK

THE LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

FILE:

The Horror of Horror

by Paul Corupe

Maybe it's not the most inventive title in the history of the genre, but the 1963 Euro-chiller *Horror* (more commonly remembered as *The Blancheville Monster*) does its best to evoke that very feeling as stylishly as possible. Shot in a crumbling, creepy Spanish citadel, director Alberto De Martino relied almost entirely on gauzy dreamlike scenes and candelabra-lit stone corridors to draw in viewers – so much so that he seems almost embarrassed when he's forced to accommodate the screenplay's checklist of Edgar Allan Poe obsessions, including family curses, Gothic castles, doomed love, family crypts and burial alive.

Dubbed into English by AIP and released to American TV, *Horror* would have reached North American audiences just as Corman's Poe cycle with Vincent Price was in full swing. But while Poe's spectre permeates this narrative, it's also remarkably difficult to get a firm hold on. Despite some promotional art boldly claiming that the film was based on one of Poe's stories, *Horror* only offers a jigsaw puzzle of various familiar scenes and moments, ill-fittingly assembled by screenwriters Bruno Corbucci and his brother Sergio (the latter of whom went on to direct *Django* and some of the best spaghetti westerns of the late 1960s).

The effect is that this 19th-century-set tale, which sees a 50th anniversary DVD release from Retromedia this month, simultaneously pays tribute to Poe's work while reducing his powerful words into simple set-ups for the desired cinematic atmosphere. In the film, college student Emily De Blancheville (Ombretta Colli) returns to her ancestral home on the eve of her birthday with friends Alice (Iran Eory) and John (Vanni Materassi) to learn that her father has recently passed away. Her brother Rodrigue (Gerard Tichy, who looks suspiciously like Vincent Price) has assumed control of the



Ombretta Colli as Emily De Blancheville.

house, and has hired a new staff of servants headed up by the inscrutable Miss Eleonore (Helga Line). Emily senses something's not right, a feeling that increases that evening while dining with the others and family physician Dr. Lerouge (Leo Anchoriz), and after she hears strange screaming coming from somewhere within the castle walls. As the creep factor climbs, and Emily catches glimpses of a scarred, ungodly creature in the dark, Rodrigue reveals that dear old dad is actually still alive and locked up in one of the towers. Worse than that, in order to lift a family curse, he's obsessed with murdering Emily before she turns 21. And that tower won't hold him forever.

There's actually a pretty solid story in there, at least partially inspired by Richard Matheson's script for Corman's initial Poe adaptation *House of Usher*, but De Martino isn't particularly interested in telling it. Instead, *Horror* makes effective use of familiar Gothic clichés to blur the line between fantasy and reality. There's a lot to admire about the look and feel (and even sound) of Emily's late-night wanderings through the castle passages in her nightgown, chasing down strange noises. Some notable lighting and flick-

ering shadows are used to set up ambiguity over whether Emily's fears are physically real or simply vivid nightmares, a tension that increases once the monster appears more frequently, demanding that Emily kill herself. Eventually, just as in a real dream, all internal logic falls by the wayside, as Emily ends up buried alive in a coffin in a scene suspiciously reminiscent of *Vampyr*. She stares out a window in her casket begging silently for help before she's sent into the bowels of the family crypt (how she actually gets out isn't quite clear).

While still eerily effective despite frequent bouts of narrative disjointedness, the strange twist of falsely promoting a film as the work of a famous writer is that it might actually convince someone watching the film that Poe's grasp of storytelling is as unstable and decrepit as the *Horror*'s Gothic setting. Style may often trump substance in genre films, but it may not be entirely acceptable to do it at the expense of one of horror's finest persons of letters. But regardless of its questionable marketing materials, *Horror* is still a pleasantly passable addition to the brief Italian Gothic fad of the 1960s, taking up permanent residence with similar black and white chillers such as *Nightmare Castle*, *Castle of Blood* and Mario Bava's *Black Sunday*. 🦋





CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

R



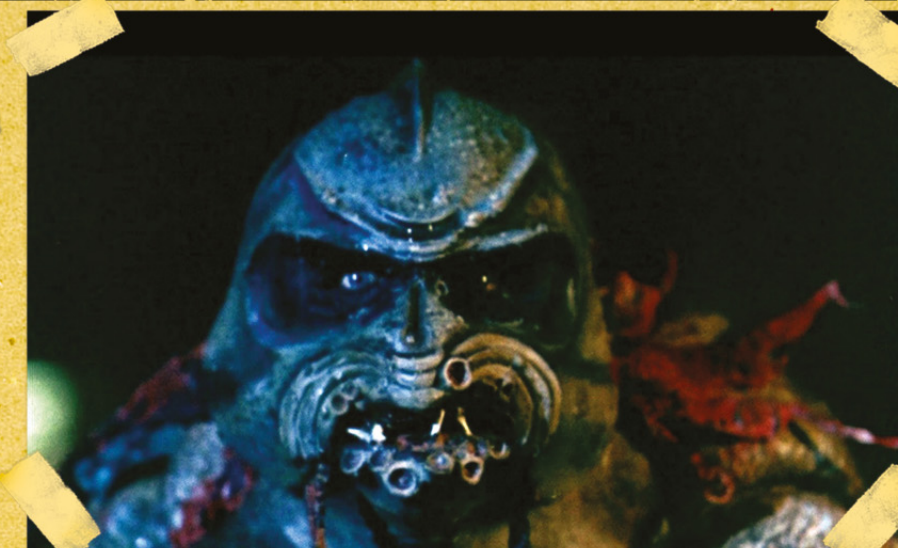
DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Revenge of the Slithis
by John W. Bowen

So here's-how it started: "I think my cousin's son tried to tell me about this back in the '80s," my friend Larry told me during a recent exchange on Facebook, "but he had a strange speech problem and it sounded more like 'Shlishish' – it terrified him and I couldn't stop laughing. I thought it was some *Doctor Who* thing." Of course, this wasn't the first time I'd heard of *Shlishish* – sorry, I mean *Slithis* (a.k.a. *Spawn of the Slithis*), a 1978 welfare cheque effort about a bulked-up toxic waste monster wreaking havoc on the populace of Venice, California. But I still hadn't seen it, and this began to weigh heavily upon me. And a column was born.

Okay, there was a bit more to it than that. By the mid-'70s, *The Exorcist*, *Jaws* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* had already destroyed most of my mind, although *Phantasm* wouldn't finish the job – slamming and barring the basement door – until the ass-end of the decade. Meanwhile, my eight-year-old cousin Scott suddenly became obsessed with a TV trailer for *Slithis*; little bastard was bound and determined to see this movie and wouldn't stop bothering his parents about it. Said parents, naturally, steadfastly refused, and his mother blamed me for telling her kids about such things. (Hey, it was my birthright to be a bad influence, just as my own older cousins had been on me, what with introducing me to Hawkwind, bathtub thorazine and such.)

Subsequently, I had the damndest time convincing Scott's mom that I'd never even heard of this flick until her offspring had told me about



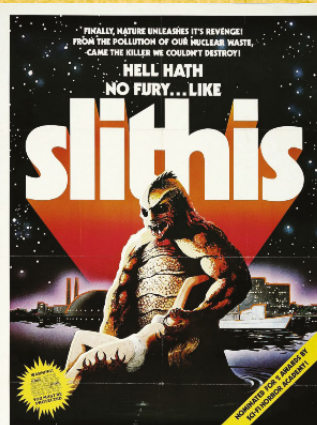
it himself. In time, all was forgotten, which included me forgetting all about *Slithis*, until that more recent conversation with Larry. Steps, naturally, needed to be taken. Did I find *Slithis*, or did it find me? Aw, fuck it – I found it.

We open on two young boys playing frisbee in slow motion. Why slo-mo? I'm not sure, but it's merely the first of writer/director Stephen Traxler's many inexplicable directorial choices, and one of almost as many wonky moments for his cinematographer, who appears to have been suffering from some sort of drug withdrawal or vertigo. At any rate, when the lads suddenly discover two mutilated dog corpses, the media blames cult rituals (an interesting pop culture anomaly, since this was still the '70s, a simpler time when the cognoscenti

who bears a truly frightening resemblance to '70s TV movie staple/game show host Bert Convy) decides this could be his ticket to tabloid immortality. With a little expository dialogue – sorry, I mean "help" – from his scientist friend, Dr. John (J.C. Claire), Wayne becomes a one-man Scooby gang, invading poorly guarded crime scenes, bribing crucial info out of the local homeless population and hiring a homily-spouting Jamaican fishing boat captain (Mello Alexandria) to ferry him around and collect underwater soil samples. All this (cough) sleuthing leads Allan to what he's suspected (and what we've pretty much known) since the get-go: the murders are being committed by...

In case it hasn't dawned on you yet, *Slithis* would make an ideal addition to your next rubber-monster-suit movie marathon, perhaps rounding out a tasting menu with *Zaat* and *Oc-taman*.

And what of my cousin Scott? To the best of my knowledge, he never did get around to seeing *Slithis*, so I'm not sure exactly when he went over to the Dark Side, but suffice to say he now works for Revenue Canada. All it takes is one phone call – just one – and I could have your sorry ass audited back to the Stone Age, so you'd best get the hell out of my basement while I'm still in a (relatively) good mood. 🍌



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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

How do you quickly and effectively differentiate your new zombie comic in a market crowded by the living dead? Simple: you make your protagonists a group of animals struggling to survive the human apocalypse.

That's the concept behind *Rex, Zombie Killer*, a title that saw life last year as a one-shot and has now returned as a four-issue limited series. Created by writer Rob Anderson and drawn by artist Dafu Yu, *Rex* has enough zombie action to satiate the most ardent horror fan, except this time the undead have to contend with a golden retriever, a pit bull, a corgi, a cat and a gorilla with a baseball bat.

"I'm definitely an animal guy," admits Anderson. "I've always been surrounded by pets and spent years volunteering at shelters, so I've always thought about what would happen to, say, my dog or cat in a zombie apocalypse. People tend to underestimate the heart and tenacity of animals, and that idea is where the story of *Rex* really comes from. Plus, I do think some people get more upset seeing a dog being chased by zombies than if a human were about to get eaten."

Last year's one-shot established the mission for Rex and his furry friends: find Rex's master, who became separated from the canine during the outbreak. That mission spills over into the new miniseries where we also learn that Rex's master happens to be a female doctor involved in animal lab experiments. These experiments are not only somehow linked into the outbreak but also the origins of Rex himself. Meanwhile, Kenji the gorilla is pursued by a group of angry simians with a grudge. If that's not enough, the gang has to continually deal with the dangers of the living dead, both human and animal.

"Our goal with this series is to really complete the tale of Rex and his pack," reveals Anderson. "Not that there aren't many more tales to tell, but

this miniseries won't be ending on a cliffhanger. Rex is focussed on reaching the human who raised him...and he knows she's essentially being held prisoner in a military bunker. He hasn't told the other animals what the situation is at the 'safe place' they're going to – and eventually things will come to a head."

Anderson and Yu are surprised at the amount of feedback they've received from younger readers. Though the book could easily be mistaken for a children's 'funny animal' book, given some of the themes and its graphic nature, the suggested rating for the title was TEEN+.

"We get emails from kids and their parents where the kids are as young as seven or eight," says Anderson. "One writer was reading the comic to her granddaughter, who loves zombie movies. Another said his daughter took the comic to show and tell! On the one hand, I hope the class didn't have too many nightmares. On the other, it's nice to think we're reaching out to a new generation of potential horror fans."

The book certainly doesn't shy away from gore or nasty imagery, and Yu has found a good way of making sure the more disturbing aspects stand out.

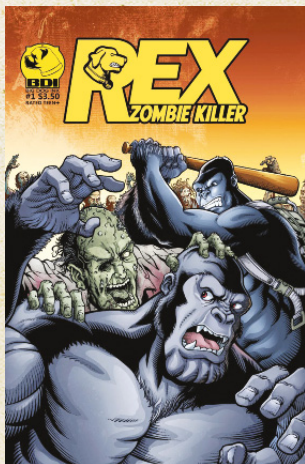
"The zombies and the settings are more realistically rendered in contrast to the animals to make the zombies seem even more scary," he says. "Even though the main characters are animals, Rob has given them very human-like personalities

and we decided it was best to render them in a slightly more cartoony fashion to show the full range of human emotion."

Unfortunately, there's still a chance adult readers may pass on it, feeling that a book populated with



The animal heroes of *Rex, Zombie Killer* face both human and non-human undead as they try to survive the apocalypse.



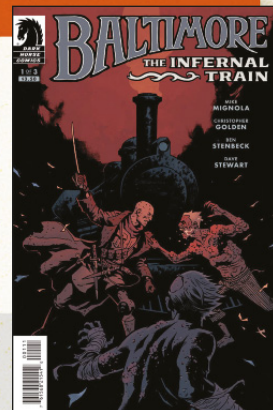
talking animals will fail to deliver the shocks and thrills expected in a horror comic.

"We are consciously playing with the expectations of a talking animal book," says Anderson. "Some people come in thinking Rex must be a Disney-type hero, but his motivations are a lot more complex, and maybe human-like, than that. So we hope the contrast between talking animals and zombie horror actually adds an unusual twist for the reader. *Rex* isn't really a funny animal book, although there's plenty of humour amidst the horror. I mean, there's a gorilla with a baseball bat smashing zombies, so it better have a sense of humour."

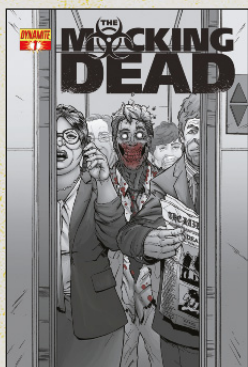
Rex, Zombie Killer #1 is on sale now. For more information visit rexzombiekiller.com.

FOLLOW PEDRO ON TWITTER @PCABEZUELO

Baltimore will stop at nothing to slay fangers; this time he heads to Budapest to confront the zealot priest Duvic, who believes the vampire hunter has been tainted with the very evil he has been fighting, and must be destroyed. But first, Baltimore has to deal with a new threat: the mysterious Lucrezia Fulcanelli and her plague furnace, a machine seemingly created to destroy the victims of the vampire infestation. As usual, Christopher Golden's characters are compelling and fit well with the overall atmosphere of death and despair that permeates Baltimore's world – brought to life nicely by Ben Stenbeck. Lucrezia adds a compelling wrinkle to what could have been a straightforward tale, and, better still, *The Infernal Train* promises more revelations and plenty of vampire action ahead.



The Mocking Dead has its tongue firmly planted in cheek. Luckily, Fred Van Lente is an expert at poking fun at concepts without completely spiralling into parody. As in many a zombie tale, there's a massive outbreak resulting in a small group of people trying to find a cure. In this case, it's the remnants of a secret government division code-named "Tinseltown," whose job it was to



analyze entertainment products – such as movies – to determine the plausibility of real-world threats and appropriate countermeasures. Armed with knowledge imbued through zombie films, the reinstated head of Tinseltown, middle-aged couch potato Aaron

Bunch, is certain he can find the solution to the plague. It's a clever concept made all the more appealing by Van Lente's wicked sense of humour, which manages to maintain enough of a semi-serious tone for the horror moments to be effective.

Talk about a great name for a hero team: a living skeleton, a shy child ghost, an ancient witch, a pyrotechnic girl and a black cat form the Halloween Legion. Together they protect their small town from the bizarre and supernatural, which happens to include goblin kidnappers from outer space. It's a charming romp filled with quirky crea-

tures in a story that's a wonderful love letter to our favourite season. Martin Powell grounds his characters in reality – for instance, Molly the devil girl's high school troubles – which gives the book a strong anchor, and Thomas Boatwright's art strikes the right balance between whimsy and the macabre. *The Halloween Legion* is highly recommended for monster kids of all ages.



Horror goes historical, then space age in *Love Stories'* opener. The first tale sees a group of Norsemen protect a monastery from vampires in 946 AD; in the second story, a space station is infested with aliens as a lone man struggles to re-



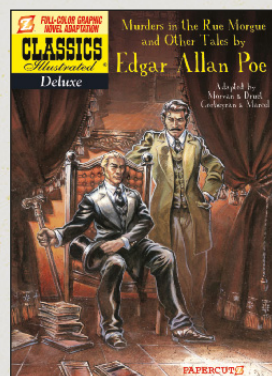
unite with his wife after initiating the self-destruct sequence. Of the two stories, the second ties in to the book's title more obviously, although a case could be made for the appropriateness of the former tale once the twist has been revealed. Regardless, both stories in *To Die For* are well-paced and nicely drawn but suffer from abrupt, anticlimactic end-

ings. Though enjoyable, it's hard not to come to the end wondering "Is that it?" A fun diversion but little else.

This latest Classics Illustrated hardcover edition features adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Gold-Bug" and "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and it isn't until you see these three tales drawn that you realize how grotesque and bloody the author's works really are. Both "Morgue" and "Roget" have truly disturbing imagery that the artists have thankfully not shied away

from (and kudos to Papercutz for not watering down the visuals despite the series' appeal to younger readers). Fabrice Druet and Paul Marcel

have also done an outstanding job of delivering engrossing art to what amounts to mostly expository dialogue. Rather than have panel upon panel of talking heads, both artists work hard to break the monotony with clever angles and other cinematic tricks. Additionally, the deluxe graphic novel format allows these stories room to breathe. The result is three fantastic adaptations that will appeal to both Poe enthusiasts and novices alike. 🍷



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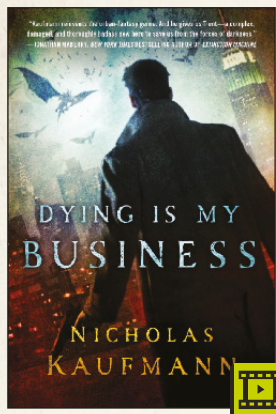
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DYING IS MY BUSINESS

Nicholas Kaufmann

St. Martin's Griffin

"It's not as easy as it looks to come back from the dead," says Trent, the narrator of Nicholas Kaufmann's *Dying Is My Business*, by way of introduction – and then, on the first page of this dark fantasy action adventure, he proceeds to do exactly that. Trent, a runner for a New York City underworld boss, is at a serious advantage in his profession, since he doesn't appear to be capable of dying – the flip side is, he has no memories that extend beyond the past year of his life. On the



Trent's loyalties are soon divided: should he stay with the mage Isaac and his group, who seek the box in order to prevent the catastrophe that would occur if it should fall into the wrong hands, or should he retrieve it for his boss, Underwood, in order to find out the truth about his past?

Kaufmann's novel bristles with suspense; the storytelling is well-paced and the narrative is packed with intrigue. Trent is a likeable narrator, even though he is deeply flawed as a human being. In fact, all of Kaufmann's key characters are fully rounded; even familiar monsters such as vampires are given personable twists, and he doesn't fall into the trap of diluting their monstrosity by making excuses for their behaviour. Rather, it is the eternal theme of what it means to be human or monstrous that is in play here, and Kaufmann handles it with dexterity. It can be seen most starkly, perhaps, in his depiction of New York City itself, at once inspiring, horrifying, beautiful, diabolical and fascinating.

It's wonderful to see the proliferation of dark, urban fantasy with heavy horror elements, and the ending of *Dying Is My Business* opens up the possibility for a sequel – or even a series – without feeling contrived or drawn out. Keep your fingers crossed.

JUSTINE WARWICK

A COLD SEASON

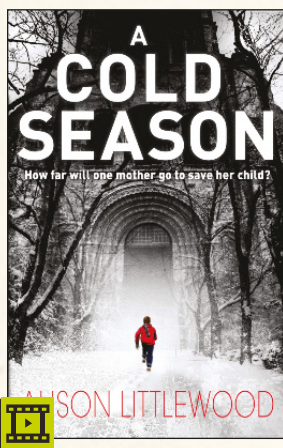
Alison Littlewood

Jo Fletcher Books

Few things are more delightful than settling down with a chilly British horror novel from the comfort of one's warm, slightly moth-eaten sofa. That said, there are certain things one expects when opening such a volume – a veritable pact with the reader that the author undertakes to uphold. Sadly, Alison Littlewood never quite delivers on the book's initial promise.

The plot contains many enjoyable horror tropes: widowed mom moves back to the countryside of her roots, whereupon Strange Things and Ominous Doings occur, and her child begins to behave peculiarly. Is there some sort of satanic cult in action? What is the meaning of the standing stones around the perimeter of the village? Are they meant to keep people out? Or, more ominously, keep something else in? It all sounds quite deliciously demonic. But we've all read this story before, in other iterations, so the execution needs to be impeccable – and it isn't.

Single mother Cass and her son Ben are the protagonists whose survival should matter to us; they are innocents ensnared by evil. But Cass is so dithery and ineffectual, with page upon page of mental, emotional and literal hand-wringing, that it quickly becomes exhausting. Even the Shocking



Reveal at the end is telegraphed very early on. Ben fares no better – as he's warped by evil influences and becomes nastier, the effect is diffused by the fact that Cass never punishes her son for his appalling behaviour; she only whimpers that she understands, because she misses his dead father too. Children in horror novels can be used to tremendous sinister effect (*The Midwich Cuckoos*) or to pull at our emotional core (as Stephen

King, Peter Straub and Robert McCammon do so well), but if they're only bratty and tiresome, it's just one more hurdle for the reader to leap. If Littlewood had given Ben more dimension and imbued him with some charm and character, his descent into evil could have been heartwrenching. Instead, we accept it with a shrug.

The most difficult thing to stomach in *A Cold Season*, however, is that Littlewood falls into the trap of many writers, who tend to "code" their female characters with traits that were already out of date in the last century: gasping, sighing, lip-biting. Not to mention the fact that Cass very rarely speaks. She does whisper a lot, though. How any of the other characters in the book can hear anything she says is beyond comprehension.

A Cold Season feels like a novel by a writer who has not read widely in the genre and who assumes her readers are less sophisticated than they are. It's too bad – metaphorically on paper it sounds good. But literally on paper? – average and, alas, forgettable.

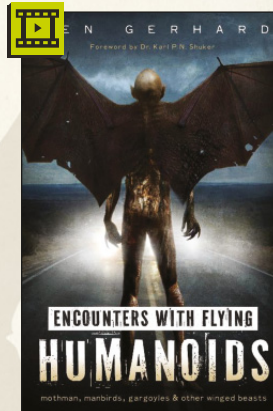
SANDRA KASTURI

ENCOUNTERS WITH FLYING HUMANIDS: MOTHMAN, MANBIRDS, GARGOYLES & OTHER WINGED BEASTS

Ken Gerhard

Llewellyn

In the early morning hours of January 16, 2004, a police officer in Monterrey, Mexico, was on routine patrol when something terrifying took place. As he cruised down a neighbourhood street, he caught sight of a black object floating towards his vehicle. It appeared to be a woman wearing a hooded cloak. Her skin was dark and her eyes were "enormous, black, and completely lidless." The entity hovered for a few moments, affording the officer a good look before he slammed the car into reverse and radioed for backup. Was it a witch, a human-like bird or a trick of the mind? It was a question that the officer and countless citizens would ask as the story made headlines.





Encounters With Flying Humanoids:
The Man Bat of Briggs Road.

This case alone will undoubtedly leave readers scratching their heads – perhaps even feeling a few chills – and it's only one of many found in *Encounters with Flying Humanoids*, the new book from cryptozoologist Ken Gerhard. Gerhard, who has spent years traversing the globe in search of man-beasts, lake monsters and other weirdness, effectively turns his eye skyward as he examines real-life sightings of “flying humanoids.”

Starting with cases dating back to the 1800s, Gerhard recounts eyewitness encounters with alleged airborne monstrosities including manlike birds, winged monsters, hovering witches and creepy aeronauts that seemingly fly without wings. Along the way, he discusses the most famous flying humanoid, Mothman, along with a flock of lesser known entities such as England's Owlman, the Bay Area Bat Thing, the Bird Woman of Da Nang, the Angels of Mons and many more. He also recounts a number of recent instances in which baffling flying humans (or perhaps extraterrestrials) were captured on video. Where applicable, Gerhard provides details of his own personal investigations into these controversial cases, giving them a fresh, first-person perspective.

The book is well written and shines with Gerhard's vast knowledge of cryptid creatures and folkloric beasts. He offers his own conclusions about the enigmatic flying humanoids, but it's ultimately left for the reader to decide what they choose to believe. Either way, it's a fascinating look at the flying humanoid phenomenon, which is more widespread than you probably ever imagined.

LYLE BLACKBURN

EVIL NEVER DIES

Mick Ridgewell
Samhain

Vampires come in all kinds of forms, and Mick Ridgewell's *Evil Never Dies* takes a look at what happens when the bloodsuckers are spewed forth from Hell itself.

The story follows Roland Millhouse, a network news reporter from Toronto who makes his way

THE GRIM READER



THE VENUS COMPLEX

Barbie Wilde

Comet Press

Shocking and explicit, Barbie Wilde's *The Venus Complex* is an intimate tour of Michael Friday's mind as he morphs from a misogynistic, hyper-intelligent university professor into a sexually-charged, calculating serial killer. Written in journal form, Friday reveals his most gory necrophilic fantasies, and then makes them a reality. Not for sensitive readers; after finishing this book you might never feel clean again.

JESSA SOBCHUK



BEWITCHED AGAIN: SUPERNATURALLY POWERFUL WOMEN ON TELEVISION 1996 – 2011

Judie D. O'Reilly

McFarland

Drawing from depictions of superpowered women appearing on television as early as the 1950s, academic Judie D.

O'Reilly traces the history of the supernaturally powerful woman into the *Buffy* and *Charmed* era. Along the way, she makes a compelling argument that female characters endowed with superpowers tend to remain relegated to traditional roles and obligations, as if to compensate for their special abilities. Brainy stuff.

ANDREA SUBISSATI



THE HAUNTED MANSION PROJECT: YEAR TWO

Rain Graves and Loren Rhoads, eds.

Damnation Books

The second installment of *The Haunted Mansion Project* combines short fiction, poetry and creative non-fiction, all penned at a writing retreat in (you guessed it) a haunted mansion in Northern California. Writers and artists contribute a mix of spooky and heady fiction, inspired by their ghostly encounters at the abode. It won't make a believer out of a sceptic, but it's an interesting compilation for ghost-hunting enthusiasts and fledgling writers alike.

JESSA SOBCHUK

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JOHN ATKINSON IS ON A MISSION TO
TEACH US MORE ABOUT THE HORROR
MOVIES WE LOVE

SPOTLIGHT on FRIGHT

by Claire Horsnell

I F YOU WANT TO REALLY GET UNDER THE SKIN OF YOUR FAVOURITE HORROR FILMS BUT CAN'T STAND THE THOUGHT OF TRYING TO PENETRATE THICK ACADEMIC PROSE, THE SWEET SPOT MIGHT JUST BE DEVIL'S ADVOCATES, a new series of smart yet accessible book-length, single-film studies, released by Auteur Press. Current titles include considerations of such films as *Let the Right One In*, *Saw* and *The Silence of the Lambs* – with coverage of *Nosferatu*, *Antichrist*, *Carrie* and *The Thing* currently brewing. The series is the diabolical conception of editor John Atkinson, who hatched the idea in 2009.

"In my experience, horror fans are extremely cine-literate and also quite critical thinkers," he says. "They are actively interested in the history of the genre and appreciate considered, intelligent analysis of it, rather than entirely 'making of'-type coverage or box-office performance – although I should say that all of the *Devil's Advocates* at least touch on the actual production, in some cases to quite revelatory effect. My educated guess was that fans would embrace a series of books that looked in detail at both classic and perhaps under-appreciated horror films from a variety of perspectives."

The first two books commissioned for the series – Anne Billson's study of *Let the Right One In* and Ian Cooper's book on *Witchfinder General* – set the tone.

"Ian's book looks at the factual history of witchfinders, then the making of the film, some textual analysis of key scenes and then considers some other examples of what you might call 'folk horror,'" says Atkinson. "Anne's is more of an impressionistic approach, and she weaves in elements of horror film history, as well as her own biography."

Although the books are primarily aimed at readers who are interested in examining their favourite films from a more academic angle, many of the authors aren't film pros or media specialists. And for those that are, Atkinson has very particular instructions.

"I ask that they try to avoid the excesses of scholarly language, while rec-

ognizing that quite a lot of the now-common currency about how even the most casual fan understands horror films – the return of the repressed, the convention of the Final Girl, etc. – actually originates in scholarly writing from the last 40 years or so," he points out. "Most of the contributors to the series so far have been non-academic – essentially fans who have some writing experience and are keen to stretch their legs over an extended analysis."

This approach presented another of the series' authors, James Rose, with quite the challenge – after proposing a number of possible titles for consideration, he was ultimately commissioned to write an analysis of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. In an effort to find a new angle on the oft-written about film, he decided to do a close, Freudian reading of it, discussing ideas of the uncanny and how they relate to the imagery and events that unfold within the movie.

"I really liked the constant use of a circle motif and how that relates to Sally's constant circling of Leatherface and his family," he explains. "In the end, it becomes a spiral, which she seemingly cannot escape, plunging her both into mortal threat and madness." He also considers the Gothic elements of the work, in chapters that examine the film's houses, omens and families.

Of course, in the world of publishing, one is always looking towards the next release and Atkinson is already planning for the future with something on David Cronenberg. He's also enthusiastic about the upcoming publication of Jez Connolly's analysis of *The Thing*.

"The film ticks all the boxes for the series – under-appreciated on release in 1982, very much a film that has been rescued and rehabilitated by the fan community and now widely regarded as a true great, yet

even now there still isn't a huge amount of literature on it."

Rose also has plenty of other titles in mind for future editions of *Devil's Advocates*.

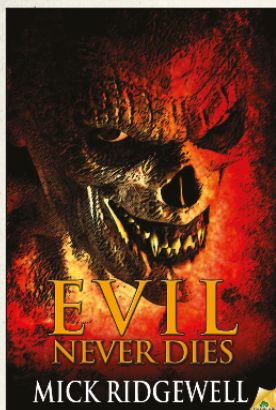
"From the perspective of a writer, I would very much like to expand the chapter on *Hellraiser* that I wrote for my first book for Auteur [*Beyond Hammer: British Horror Cinema since 1970*], and possibly, Richard Stanley's *Dust Devil* and Christophe Gans' *Silent Hill*," he says. "I think I could really get my teeth into those films!"

DEVIL'S ADVOCATES

WITCHFINDER GENERAL

IAN COOPER





to the small town of Kings Shore. His latest assignment is a small public interest piece on Patricia Owens, a lifelong resident of the community who has recently celebrated her 120th birthday. Patricia has accumulated a number of stories over the years, but there is one in particular she wishes to tell Roland. During the spring of 1912, a great evil descended upon the town of Kings Shore. A pack of demonic vampires decided to make the community their home and began to feed on the locals. One by one, the residents were consumed and transformed by these feral creatures of the night, and it was up to Patricia and the rest of the surviving townsfolk to put an end to the nightmare.

Patricia's story is recorded by Roland, while she recounts the details to him through entries in her journal. There is certainly a place for this kind of straightforward storytelling, but here it seems shallow. The plot constantly seems to hint at something much bigger and far more sinister going on behind the scenes, but in the end the reader is left high and dry, disappointedly waiting for a twist that never comes. There is, however, plenty of action and gore as both the humans and the vampires bite it in some pretty grisly ways. It's just a shame that the momentum is squandered every few pages so we can hear about how Roland and Patricia are drinking lemonade or going for a walk. Also, very little of what takes place in the modern-day setting has anything to do with the rest of the story and feels like filler.

Readers who prefer their vampires on the more monstrous side of the spectrum will find some things to like here, but those looking for a little more substance will feel underwhelmed and should probably slake their thirst elsewhere.

MIKE BEARDSALL

TALES OF JACK THE RIPPER

Ross E. Lockhart, ed.
Word Horde

Who was he? What was he? Why was he...? "No theory will ever satisfy, because the Ripper was much more than the hand that held the knife. ... The Ripper can never be contained by any one suspect, or conspiracy, or narrative. In Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors, he is represented only by a shadow, the last and final word on the Ripper's legacy," says Orrin Grey in a tale called "Ripperology."

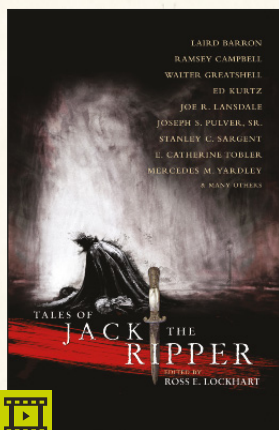
Grey's short story is among those included in *Tales of Jack the Ripper*, a collection edited by Ross E. Lockhart through his new publishing company, Word Horde. The veteran editor is best known for two volumes of *Books of Cthulhu* (RM#129), and his Ripper anthology is based on a similar template: a few reprints are there to spice up a host of original stories.

Classics worthy of a revisit include offerings from Ramsey Campbell ("Jack's Little Friend," a creepy possession tale), Alan M. Clark and Gary A. Braunbeck ("A Host of Shadows," about a dying Ripper haunted by his dark legacy) and Joe R. Lansdale ("The God of the Razor," which delivers top-notch pulp), plus two poems by Ann K. Schwader.

The new entries embody a variety of approaches to flesh out Jack's shadow: from Victorian period pieces to reincarnations of Jack's spirit in our modern serial killer culture. "Ripping" by Walter Greatshell is about a battle of wits between a shady casting agent and the potential star of his Jack-inspired horror. Orrin Grey's aforementioned "Ripperology" offers a clever reflection on the Ripper and those fascinated by him. "Villains, by Necessity," by Pete Rawlik, playfully employs iconic genre characters; Jekyll and Hyde, Sherlock Holmes and Fu Manchu populate this all-too-brief tale, which reads like the first chapter of a novel. The very best here, however, is "Termination Dust," a novelette from horror's new master, Laird Barron (RM#132). Its 30 pages contain a novel's worth of characters and intrigue in an isolated Alaskan town beset by a vicious serial killer. It's like *30 Days of Night* meets *Twin Peaks*.

One rarely finds a collection where all of the stories are great, and at least one half of this one is made up of very entertaining reading material while the remaining half is still solid enough to merit the attention of horror aficionados and ripperologists everywhere.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ



LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

RETURN OF THE KING

I read a lot of Stephen King when I was a kid. By the time I was fourteen in 1990, I'd read everything he'd released up until that point and even embarked on a school assignment in which I compared the oeuvre of King to that of Clive Barker. Eventually, though, I burned out on his catalogue, which was fine because as I grew older I discovered dozens of other horror scribes with tantalizing new chills to imbue.

I still return to King occasionally. I went *Under the Dome* a couple Christmases ago and sporadically revisit the classics, such as *Pet Sematary*, but that wide-eyed allure of my youth is gone. Perhaps I'm simply too well-read now; maybe the tropes and themes of horror have become too comfortable under my skin. What do they say about childhood places — one can never truly go home?

Then, to my utter surprise, I did. Like many of you I had a copy of *Doctor Sleep*, the sequel to *The Shining*, in my hands on September 24, when it was released — and no small amount of reservations in my head. King was revisiting one of my favourite stories after almost 40 years, an idea that inherently screamed *Danger! Danger!* Nevertheless, I cracked the book on a recent flight, and by page 150 I didn't want to put it down for anything.

It's no secret that *Doctor Sleep* concerns the trajectory of *The Shining's* Danny Torrance as an adult. But it's not merely a tale of his struggles with his own alcoholism and the remnants of his childhood gift/curse. It's just as much the story of Abra, a young girl with similar mental talents, and of the True Knot, a demented "family" of creatures who once were human but now subsist on brutally torturing and murdering children for their "steam" (their term for "the shining"). King sets these three narrative threads on an inevitable collision course, continually stoking the dread and suspense as we rattle ceaselessly towards an escalating series of body-count confrontations. Far from a cash-in, *Doctor Sleep* is full of the lean, mean storytelling that made the author a household name, from its cavalcade of strong, well-developed characters (Abra is precisely the kind of off-the-charts powerful girl who would have endeared herself to eleven-year-old me) to its deceptively simple yet satisfying story, which clips along despite its 528 pages. Best of all, the book expands the mythology of the Overlook Hotel without any tired re-treading of those decades-old plot points.

To be perfectly blunt: this is how you do a long-overdue sequel. Read it, and consider yourself schooled by the King.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY GARY PULLIN

THIS MONTH: TILT 'EM ALL!

To coincide with last month's release of *Metallica Through the Never* – a 3-D Imax movie that's half concert film and half genre flick about a roadie who must go head-to-head with one of death's horsemen – the band commissioned one of their favourite artists, pop culture junkie Dirty Donny (*RM#109*), to create artwork for three newly minted pinball machines.

This isn't the first time Donny has been called upon by the band to design a pinball machine. A few years back, he created two Metallica-inspired games for James Hetfield through pinball artist Wade Krause and designer Tanio Klyce. Both were Frankensteined together using existing machines, including "Elvira and the Party Monsters" and "Earthshaker," with the panels replaced with those featuring Donny's signature style artwork.

This latest trio of machines, however, unleashes entirely new beasts. Donny was tasked with developing three different designs for Stern Pinball: the Pro and Premium models, and the awesome Master of Puppets limited edition.

"We completely redesigned all the graphics and programming," says Donny. "It's built to be Metallica pinball from the ground up – artwork, game play, playfield design and programming."

Donny's grimacing graphics are impressive. There's plenty of detailing here – not a millimetre of space is wasted – and he's even turned the band into Ed Roth-style monsters.

"Well, mostly it's my version of them, the way I draw them," he explains. "That's what the band digs. I worked on them with James [Hetfield]. He actually made a bunch of sketches. He's a good artist; he designed the Metallica logo way back when."

Donny employed traditional techniques to create the imagery, using brush and ink on card stock. Then all the art was scanned in digitally and dropped into the machine templates provided by Stern. The process proved

a huge challenge for Donny, who spend about six months creating and designing the machines. But as a diehard gamer himself, he didn't think twice about committing to the project.

"I'm a pinball fan myself so I really wanted the overall look to have what I feel a pinball machine should look like. I wanted every single detail to be perfect."

Fans snapped up all 500 of the limited edition Master of Puppets machines in less than 45 minutes, a sales record for Stern. The other two designs are open-ended editions. If you can't afford one for yourself, not to worry, says Donny.

"I've been travelling a lot and have been witnessing the birth of Barcades – bars with pinball and '80s video games. These bars have existed before here and there but they are really starting to catch on now. I saw two in Chicago. Pinball is in pretty much every rock 'n' roll bar in Portland, and Shorty's in Seattle has been doing it for years."



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THE GORE-MET

MENU: NEW HAMPSHIRE BUSH MEAT

When I started this column in 2000, VHS still ruled. Because of the relatively low cost of video cameras, it was also the medium of choice for independent filmmakers. Indistinct images, inaudible sound and erratic edits were part and parcel of the VHS experience. Oh, how times have changed! Let's dig into the first low-budget, high-definition indie Blu-ray to slither into Casa del Gore-met...

Flood Reed's *Slew Hampshire* (2013) is a sumptuous visual feast with a decidedly offbeat and engaging plot. In 1994, four high school buddies who've gone off to different colleges get together for a weekend road trip to a secret strip joint over the New Hampshire border in Quebec. On the way back, they run off the road and into the clutches of a clan of creepy rednecks who rape young men before setting them loose in the wilderness in order to hunt them down for sport. Unfortunately, the rednecks are the least of the dangers lurking in the woods.

"At first glance, New Hampshire is a lovely, seemingly innocuous place, devoid of any discernible mystique," admits Reed. "A lot of people can't even locate it on a map; it's simply that non-descript. But for every delightful Robert Frost poem generated on NH soil, there's a G.G. Allin self-mutilation or public defecation to match. Building on the ominous state motto — Live Free or Die — and using the largely unpopulated outer reaches of the state as a backdrop, I wanted to put New Hampshire on the map and give viewers a reason to think twice about ever visiting."

The film turns in tone from a goofy comedy of errors to serious horror, while riding its bizarre premise. Reed assembled a fantastic cast that totally sells the absurdity of their situation.

"At the time that *Slew Hampshire* was con-



ceived, I just happened to be surrounded by a group of friends and colleagues whose obvious talent was being criminally underutilized," he says of his casting decisions. "As a result, many of the roles were actually written with these specific actors in mind. I also held an open call in Los Angeles, which is where I met and cast a few additional talents, including Dayo Okeniyi [of *The Hunger Games*]."

Reed incorporated different styles and colour palettes in the cinematography, from pastoral panoramas of rivers and mountains to surreal dream states to grainy, frenetic action sequences, drawing from a well of influences that include films as diverse as Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978), Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995) and P.T. Anderson's *Boogie Nights* (1997).

"I wanted to deliver something that felt familiar and yet still discomforting and difficult to nail down," he says. "Something that utilized classic horror motifs and yet

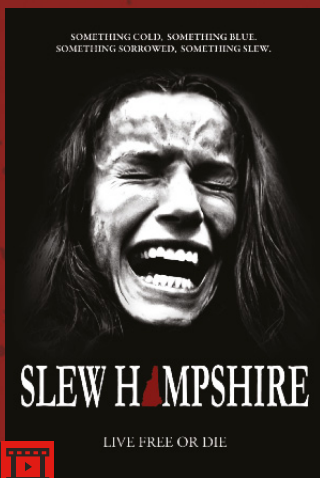
packaged them unpredictably in terms of narrative structure and editing style. *Slew Hampshire*

is definitely an experiment in hybrid horror — an amalgamation of numerous subgenres — and yet there are core story elements that are also a blatant middle finger to conventional horror 'wisdom' and formula."

The gore is class and includes such gags as chopped-off penises, cannibalized faces and disembowelled corpses, but Reed had originally written something even bloodier. Luckily, he had some talented bloodslingers to back him up.

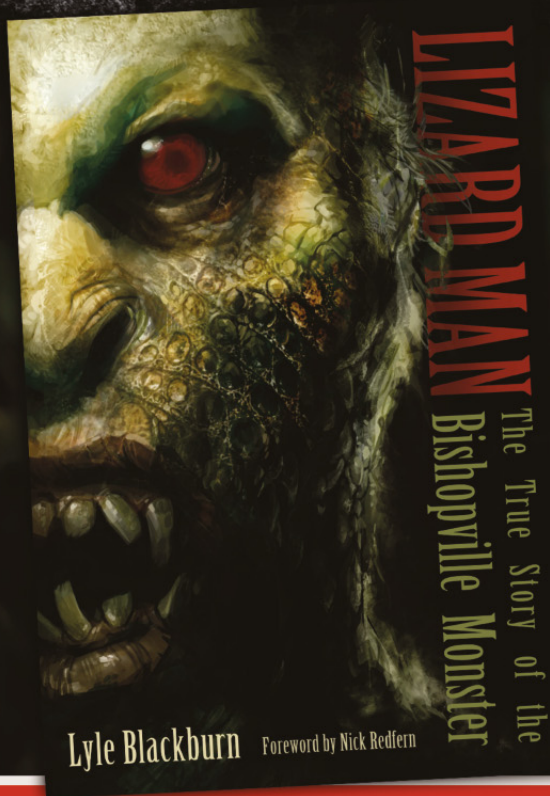
"Practical/gore FX and makeup were handled primarily by the inimitable underground legend-in-the-making Michael Todd Schneider — a.k.a. Mikey magGot — with an invaluable assist by Eric James," says Reed. "Both Michael and Eric also appeared in the film, though, so scheduling FX around their shooting schedules was a bit of a nightmare. On the page, this film was wall-to-wall blood and guts — to the extent that I detailed each killing to read like a coroner's report. We were only able to allocate about one-third of what had been requested for FX. ... [So] the audience's imagination and participation — as opposed to mere observation and inevitable desensitization — became a key factor in selling the gore."

It's early in the life of *Slew Hampshire*, but so far it's premiered in New Hampshire and Los Angeles and Reed's looking at offers for distribution. So keep an eye out for it, dear readers! ♥



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AND



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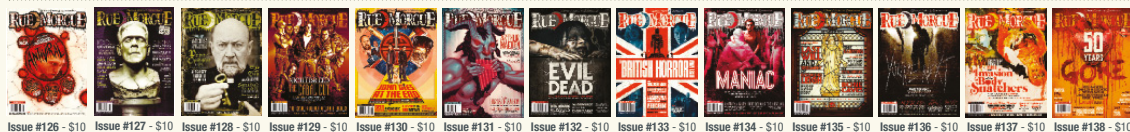
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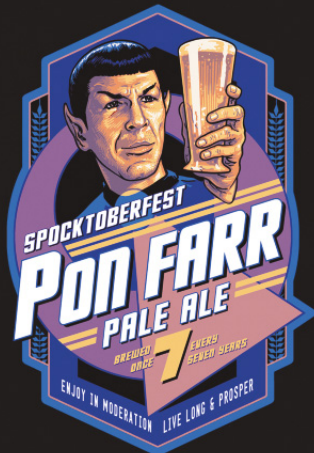
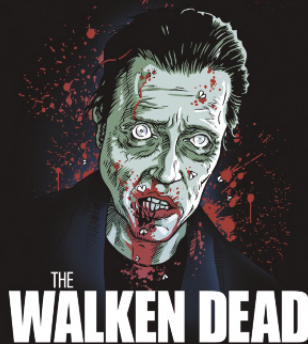
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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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AUDIO DROME

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DEAD ON
ARRIVAL

REVIEWS BY MARK R. HASAN, KIEL HUME, AARON VON LUPTON,
SHAWN MACOMBER, GEORGE PACHECO AND GLENN TILSON



RE-ANIMATOR

Richard Band

WAXWORK RECORDS

For its debut release, Waxwork offers up Richard Band's score for that fluorescent green '80s cult classic *Re-animator*. Like other recent LP reissues, this one features new artwork, done here by *Rue Morgue*'s own Gary Pullin, and includes an 18x24 poster of the same image. The 180g vinyl is pressed on bright green marbled wax; it's also available in a glow-in-the-dark variant – and get this: when you order you don't know which version you'll receive! Much has been said of Band lifting from Bernard Herrmann's *Psycho* score for the opening moments of the film, and though the composer does not address these claims in his mini-essay in the album's liner notes, director Stuart Gordon does, claiming that it was intended as homage. One listen and you'll find the depth of similarity a little difficult to dismiss, but it remains a quirky and eccentric piece that, like the film itself, is unique and impossible to pin down. **AVL** ☹☹☹☹ 1/2

SOUNDTRACK

kin beer-drinking music. Opening up with a sound clip from, appropriately, *Pumpkinhead*, the album tears into the surprisingly metallic "Vengeance the Demon," before Joe Whiteford's frail and haunting vocals build atmosphere through tales of loneliness and despair. The core of the album, however, is structured around October 31, with a version of John Carpenter's *Halloween* theme, and the epic album title trilogy "A Celebration," "Dormant" and "Revenge." Acoustic guitar, upright bass and brushed drums combine to paint dark autumn tales that drip with eerie atmosphere, and just when you think it can't get any more bleak, the band spins a cover of *Paint It Black*. Remember to bring a flashlight. **AVL** ☹☹☹☹



UNMOTHERED

S/T

TOXIC ASSETS

Calling themselves haunt-rock, the three Southern boys from Austin, Texas, that comprise Unmothered make exactly the kind of music the Lost Boys might have ridden into town to if they'd left California and spent their time raising hell at some county fair. The American South might be God's country, but this sure as shit is the Devil's music, with a healthy mix of sludgy Southern riffs and distinctive otherworldly reverb. The band's debut EP delivers a kind of doom-spattered groove metal that falls somewhere between YOB and White Zombie in its "Thunder Kiss 65" days. With songs such as "The Awakening," "Leviathan" and "Dark Energy," Unmothered's guitar-driven sound focusses on the mysterious, the incomprehensible and the terrifying. Add to this a few samples from *The Prince of Darkness* and Johnny Ringo's best line from *Tombstone*, and you'll soon discover Unmothered doesn't just want your blood – it wants your soul! **KH** ☹☹☹☹

ROCK



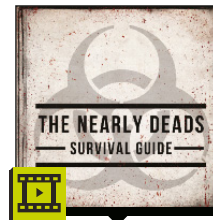
SALEM RAGES

Splinters

VISIBLE NOISE

The Salem Witch Trials might have happened on what is now US soil, but people always forget that the perpetrators (not to mention the witches themselves) were jolly ol' British colonists. Appropriately hailing from Liverpool, Salem Rages is the punk-rock answer to a serious lack of evil witches in modern music. Evoking the dark aesthetic and riffs of early AFI, along with a howl that would impress the Danzig-era Misfits, the band has all the right ingredients for a gloom-punk cauldron of good times. *Splinters* collects songs from the group's previous three EPs, cataloguing its musical evolution and mission to bring new life to Satan's most misunderstood and mistreated followers. The album kicks off with "The Curtain Fall," a high-energy number about crucifixion, before throttling up to full gear with a nine-track musical crucible. Double, double, toil and trouble abounds. **KH** ☹☹☹☹

PUNK



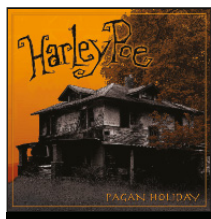
THE NEARLY DEAD'S

Survival Guide

STANDBY RECORDS

"I am the lionhearted warrior," declares The Nearly Deads' frontwoman Theresa Jeane on the opening track of *Survival Guide* in a croon that's equal parts Kelly Clarkson and Amy Lee. "I am steadfast, I am strong. I am invincible and powerful. I am courageous, I am fearless, I am free." That's a lot of self-affirmation shoehorned into a single verse. So what exactly is Jeane psyching herself up to face? Well, doubters, haters and fair-weather lovers who "never really cared," naturally. But also zombies. At least judging from the video for "Never Look Back," in which the band and friends are hunted by a horde of Actually Totally Undeads. Will a half-dozen salvos of shimmering, anthem-heavy, siren-fronted high-energy pop-punk be enough to fight them off? It appears so, as the Nearly Deads' Facebook page refers to the band's fans as the "zombie nation." Game, set, match. **SM** ☹☹☹☹

PUNK



HARLEY POE

Pagan Holiday

HORRORHOUND RECORDS

Horror folk punk outfit Harley Poe creates a darker shade of orange and black on *Pagan Holiday*, its latest (and first release by the new Horrorhound record label). While 2012's *Satan, Sex and No Regrets* was dialed down folk, *Pagan Holiday* speeds things up considerably, achieving the perfect pump-

FOLK

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW

Óscar Araujo

SUMTHING ELSE MUSIC WORKS

Óscar Araujo's gorgeous score for Konami's 2010 reboot of the video game franchise – in which knights battle against supernatural forces – is definitely epic. The orchestral scope and cues with a mixed chorus chanting Latin liturgies are stunning, and the score is surprisingly bereft of generic musical clichés. Araujo's focus is on the medieval period; his cues unravel with grace, action material rises instead of pumps and thunders, and thematic passages often lull the listener into quiet contemplation ("Love Lost" in particular). The album features a balanced mix of action, tension and bonding, with edits and sequencing providing a genuinely engrossing journey – a web-only limited edition will feature an additional 20-plus minutes of score. Note: this isn't an album for playing in the background; like any great work, you're compelled to stop, sit and appreciate the beauty of the writing. **MRH** ☹☹☹☹

SOUNDTRACK



LISTEN *to* MY NIGHTMARE

There really was no other band like the original 'Fits, but by the time the second incarnation of the group released *Famous Monsters* in 1999, singer Michale Graves had established himself as the new defining sound of horror-punk, with his balance of aggressive p-rock snarl and '50s-influenced crooning. Like Glenn Danzig, Graves became the band's centrepiece, its sound built around his powerful and melodic singing style, so there's always been interest in what the skeleton-makeup-wearing fiend would do after leaving the band in 2000. Though the results have been uneven at best, from the punk-meets-alterna-rock



of the band Graves, to numerous lacklustre solo projects, he now makes a triumphant return to his horror punk roots on *The Lost Skeleton Returns* (Hydraulic Entertainment).

"I had been searching for a way back – but I knew if I was going to do it, it had to be new, a recasting of my character," explains Graves. "So we evolved the persona I created in the late 1990s into the

'Skel-crow.' With the evolved character in hand, all I needed was a project to launch it in"

That came about when Graves met Mark Allen Stuart, CEO of Hydraulic Entertainment.

"Mark is a monster/sci-fi expert and he came up with the title and the idea for the album – he feels I am the original Lost Skeleton and this album my 'return' to the music I love."

"Return" is an appropriate descriptor, given that the disc features new recordings of seven Misfits songs (including "American Psycho," "Scream" and "Saturday Night"), three solo-career tracks and some newly penned cuts dedicated to some of Graves' favourite horror films, including "Night of the Living Dead" and his personal favourite "Last Man on Earth".

The new versions differ very little from those on *American Psycho* and *Famous Monsters*, while the original material also hews close to that classic hook-laden sound. But *The Lost Skeleton Returns* aims to be more than a music project, with Graves also creating an extended music video for the track "Zombie" and another for "Night of the Living Dead," both of which feature Skel-pira, winner of a horror hostess contest.

"We want to recreate the feeling of sitting in front of the TV in 1955, watching a horror movie," says Graves. "That's why Skel-pira was created. What is a monster movie without a horror hostess?"

If you're a Misfits fiend and dig Graves' new gig, you're in luck, as he promises a total of four new albums to be released over the next year, including an acoustic version of *The Lost Skeleton Returns*.

"Now that I'm back – I'm never leaving," he promises.

AARON VON LUPTON



GHOUL

Intermediate Level Hardcore

TANKCRIMES

By now you probably know Ghoul's gimmick: the mysteriously masked act claims to hail from the deepest, darkest Romanian suburb of "Creepsylvania," a place where the band has nurtured its unrelenting brand of crossover '80s thrash, peppered with a hefty dose of early death metal atmosphere and punk rock spirit. Ghoul's back catalogue has nicely balanced its demonic back story of grave-robbing, unholy punk nihilism with actual musical chops, although it's also public knowledge that the lineup includes members of other bands, including infamous Carcass-worshipping death metallers Impaled. *Intermediate Level Hardcore* is a brief EP of cover songs from Ghoul's punk rock roots, including a track from Canada's Dayglo Abortions, and "Americanized," an early GWAR tune, which features none other than Oderus Urungus covering himself on co-vocals! The end results are fast, loose and fun, and serve as a nice stop-gap until the band's next LP of cemetery speed metal. **GP** ☠☠☠



COFFINS

Colossal Hole

HORROR PAIN GORE DEATH PRODUCTIONS

This limited 10" vinyl and digital release from Coffins – Japan's foremost purveyors of crusty, musty doom/death metal – is comprised of three demo versions of songs that appeared on their Relapse Records debut, *The Fleshland*, earlier this year. Although demos, these tracks are still very much indicative of the band's classic gore 'n' sludge style. How disgusting is this EP? It comes with a set of two barf bags straight out of a *Zombi 2* screening! This release will likely most interest ardent fans and those who don't already own the Relapse record, given that

"Hellbringer," "No Saviour" and the EP's title track didn't go through many structural changes before they were re-recorded, but there is something to be said about the atmosphere and primeval heaviness that can be harnessed during the pre-production stages of a record. And Coffins is in no shortage of that electricity here. **GP** ☠☠☠ 1/2



CARCASS

Surgical Steel

NUCLEAR BLAST

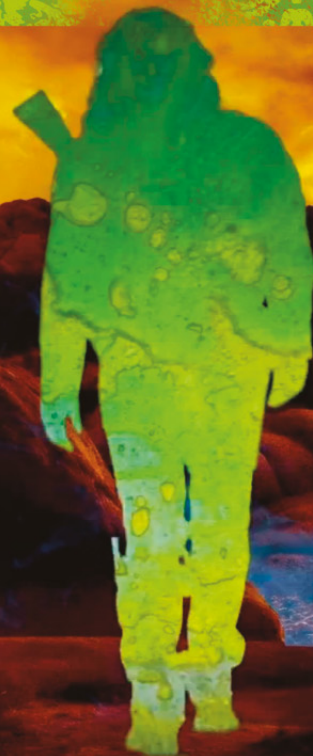
Carcass is easily one of the most influential gore bands on the planet, known for injecting medical textbook terminology into splatter classics such as *Reek of Putrefaction* and *Necroticism – Descanting the Insalubrious* before cleaning up their act on the more accessible (and overrated) melodic death metal album *Heartwork*. Since *Surgical Steel* is the band's first album in seventeen years, many wondered which sound the new disc would adopt. Alas, it's mostly the latter. *Surgical Steel* isn't a bad album per se. There are some great songs, such as the aptly titled "Thrasher's Abattoir" and the ferociously catchy "The Granulating Dark Satanic Mills," and long-time collaborator Colin Richardson's production is superb. Similarly, frontman Jeff Walker's snarl has only grown more vicious over time and Bill Steer's leads have a grim, majestic beauty. But ultimately the album title is appropriate in all the wrong ways: sleek and polished, rather than serrated and razor-sharp. Death metal album of the year? Sorry, Autopsy will take that honour. **GT** ☠☠☠ 1/2



PHIL MUCCI WRANGLES AN ARRAY OF EUROHORROR, AMERICAN GRINDHOUSE AND EVEN STANLEY KUBRICK INFLUENCES INTO HIS AWARD-WINNING, MIND-BLOWING, EYE-POPPING, HEAVY METAL MUSIC VIDEOS

ALL THE SABBOTS OF THE DARK

by AARON MOORE



Back in 2007, *Rue Morgue* awarded Phil Mucci's *The Listening Dead* Best Short of the Year.

Since then, Mucci has taken the genre to the forefront of heavy metal's elite, becoming one of the most innovative music video makers on the scene. He writes, directs, animates, illustrates, shoots and edits music videos for the likes of Opeth, Pig Destroyer and High On Fire. And he does so with a distinctly horror aesthetic.

"Horror has been a favourite since I was young," explains Mucci. "Watching *Superfriends*, I'd root for the Legion of Doom and their diabolical plans for world domination. I loved *Scooby-Doo*, but always thought it was a letdown when the monster turned out to be a dude in disguise."

Mucci's style has earned him widespread attention, particularly for his surreal 2011 video for Opeth's "The Devil's Orchard," a track steeped in '70s-style progressive rock. The video resembles a melancholic, fever dream that honours the filmmaker's lifelong infatuation with erotic vampire cinema and Italian giallo.

"I'm a huge [Dario] Argento fan; his influence is everywhere in my stuff," he says. "To me, *Suspiria* is his masterpiece. It's such a singular film, relying more heavily on colour, music and mood than any other horror film I've ever seen. Beyond that, the main influences would have to be [Roger] Corman's *The Trip*, [F.W.] Murnau's *Faust* and [Jess] Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos*."

Though Opeth's music is certainly dark, it's not exactly what you would call soundtrack music for a horror flick from the '70s. Regardless, Mucci sees a strong connection between the two.

"I've always been inspired by old films, especially low-budget indie horror and sci-fi," he says. "There's a tangible joy to them and you get the sense that the filmmakers were having a blast; ideally I'd like my work to evoke that same feeling. They did a lot with very little – not only with tricks and

techniques, but also in the storytelling and ethereal tone of their exploitation. Jess Franco's films are basically the Euroslaze precursor to music videos in many ways."

Success followed Mucci with his psychedelic, apocalyptic monster 'n' bikers-themed video for High On Fire's "Fertile Green" (pictured above), from their 2012 album *De Vermis Mysteriis* (named after a fictional grimoire that appears in the work of novelist Robert Bloch), which scooped up *Revolver*

Magazine's Music Video of the Year. That same year saw videos for Pig Destroyer's "The Diplomat" – a bloody allegory influenced by the opening of Stanley Kubrick's *2001* – and, more recently, the undead-themed video for Stone Sour's "Do Me a Favor." Mucci's latest, for the song "Zenith" by the band Huntress, premiered in late August.

"Huntress was the first band to ever contact me before they went into the studio to record," says Mucci. "It's no exaggeration to say that [singer] Jill Janus, as the Starbound Beast and the Virgin Oracle in the video, gives the best heavy metal monster performance since Ozzy's werewolf. She's amazing."

The epic video also features black magic, interstellar possession, heavy metal space gods and fleets of flying saucers hell-bent on thumping the galaxy to smithereens. While it may seem like a heavy metal video that highlights the genre's more visceral elements – marrying the ferocity of the music with violence and gore – Mucci insists that a more cerebral approach runs through his work.

"I never really got into slashers," he says, "my taste is definitely about the allegorical fantasy and psychological aspects. A lot of horror films are made to turn a quick buck, but I prefer the work of filmmakers who take the genre seriously and try to say something within the context of creeping people out. There's a real beauty to that kind of dark fiction that I find truly singular, both aesthetically and intellectually." 🐼



Huntress – "Zenith"



High On Fire – "Fertile Green"

PLAY DEAD



NOW PLAYING > AMNESIA: A MACHINE FOR PIGS, RAIN, RAVAGED: ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE, CATASTROPHIC ZOMBIES!



AMNESIA: A MACHINE FOR PIGS

PC
Frictional Games



At first, one might feel that this follow-up to 2011's *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* is more akin to an elaborate mod than a proper sequel. But as in the original, subtlety is its strength, sneaking up on you, not to spook you with spirits, but to horrify you with the story.

As in *The Dark Descent*, you play a man who has lost his memory. This time you're rich industrialist Oswald Mandus, who awakens alone in his mansion after dreaming of a large, menacing machine; your children are missing and a mechanical whirring is emanating from somewhere below you. As you explore your surroundings, you receive occasional phone calls from a man calling himself "the engineer," find odd recorded conversations between yourself and others cued up on victrolas, and discover notes strewn around about the various experiments you're undertaking. These elements help flesh out Oswald's past and eventually guide him down into the industrial bowels of 1899 London, where he hopes to find his children. The most direct path is sabotaged, of course, so you must solve minor puzzles (usually involving complicated machinery) in order to continue.

Unfortunately, minimal scares and stripped mechanics (no inventory system, no fuel needed for your lantern, and no sanity meter

to manage) make this semi-sequel feel weak at first. But apart from those absences, there isn't any perceptible change in gameplay (you still have basic FPS controls, though without the shooting part) or graphics (a bit above original Xbox quality).

To the game's credit, however, the simplicity of play allows for stronger, smoother storytelling. Instead of worrying about keeping a dark castle lit lest you lose your mind, you can immerse yourself in the steam-powered tale

of playing god, while marvelling at the ominous machinery that surrounds you. The soundtrack, which combines engine clanks and mechanical squeals with drones and shrill operatic tones, only helps to pull you in.

In what appears to be an attempt to expand upon the ideologies of *Dark Descent* (i.e. to push gaming away from brainless fun and into the realm of atmospheric art), *A Machine for Pigs* does away with a lot of what made the original a game, opting to deliver a harrowing, interactive experience instead.

PATRICK DOLAN



HEADSHOTS: STRONG ARTISTIC AESTHETIC, IMMERSIVE AND CREEPY STORY
MISFIRES: REPETITIVE AND EASY PUZZLES, LACK OF MECHANICS



RAIN

Playstation Network
Playstation C.A.M.P!



Rain may seem like an odd fit for this column... initially. In this PSN downloadable title, you control a boy who leaves his bedroom one rainy night after seeing a phantom girl pursued by bizarre spectral creatures. Finding that you've also become invisible – except when standing under the falling rain – you seek shelter beneath conveniently placed awnings, roofs and walkways, while attempting to catch up to the girl and evading those who are hunting her.

With gameplay structured around linear platforming and puzzle-solving, the learning curve is far from steep. You have no weapons or powers, only the urban environment and the camouflage it provides to keep you safe from the spectral beings and their imposing club-wielding master, "The Unknown."

There are no big scares and zero bloodshed, but it occupies the same thematic space as the films of Guillermo del Toro or the books of Neil Gaiman – that nebulous area where the genre and fairy tales

meet. There's a hypnotic dreamlike tone to the proceedings, which is augmented by stellar art direction, music and sound design, as well as an oppressive underlying current of loneliness. Aside from the girl and her pursuers, the streets are eerily empty, adding an ever-so-subtle sense of dread to the experi-

ence. The narrative is deliberately threadbare, relying primarily on atmosphere, punctuated by moments of tension when the creatures catch wind of you and relentlessly give chase.

While it won't provide the same level of goosebumps as a visit to *Silent Hill*, *Rain* is a near-perfect translation of the dream-state to digital form and is well worth a spin for those looking for something off the beaten path.

RON MCKENZIE



HEADSHOTS: BEAUTIFUL GRAPHICS AND SOUND DESIGN, GREAT CREATURE DESIGN
MISFIRES: MAY BE TOO LAZILY FOR HORROR GAMERS, LOW REPLAY VALUE



RAVAGED: ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

PC

Reverb Publishing

The whole just-add-zombies approach to popular culture has become almost as rote and lifeless as the shambling dead themselves. Yet that's just what *Ravaged: Zombie Apocalypse* does, adding copious deaders to its team-based, 2012 multiplayer first-person shooter *Ravaged*. That's not to say there's no fun to be had, though. There are five playable classes (recon, soldier, sniper, weapon specialist and support), plenty of different kinds of weapons and vehicles at your disposal to dispense of the dead, and the five-person and 24-person matches bring a strategic element to the proceedings (that is, if you are ever able to get that many people into a scenario at once – every time I logged on there were less than 30 people playing total). Unfortunately, the zombies themselves offer little variety (either in appearance or attacks) and the only type of campaign available is a timed resource run. The maps fare better, even though they all riff off the same decrepit post-apocalyptic theme, regardless if you are waging war in the desert, the grounds of an asylum or anywhere else. You do get the original *Ravaged* when you buy the zombie version, which has more campaign options (Capture the Resource, Team Deathmatch and Thrust), but no undead, so it will likely be of little interest to hardcore horror gamers. These multiplayer online-only titles live or die by their community, and I'm sorry to report that in that regard *Ravaged: Zombie Apocalypse* barely has a pulse.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



HEADSHOTS: DECENT GRAPHICS, VARIED SCENARIO DIFFICULTY LEVELS

MISFIRES: A BIT BUGGY, TOO LITTLE OVERALL VARIETY, NOT ENOUGH PLAYERS



CATASTROPHIC ZOMBIES!

iPhone, iPad, Android

De COLOPL, Inc.

Zombies have now officially shambled into virtually every type of video game known to man. *Catastrophic Zombies!* injects them into a *Candy Crush*-esque puzzler that utilizes your brain to fend off the undead. In it, you work through coloured-block puzzles while an undead horde steadily moves towards a barricade at the top of the screen. Sliding similarly shaded blocks into a row or a square will unleash a salvo of destruction at the putrid masses. But beware: every time you make a move, the undead horde also advances one step closer to your barricade; if they reach it, they will tear it apart in a few moves.

Complete a couple lines at once to receive kill combos and multipliers to help thin the herd, or you can visit the store to upgrade your barricade and purchase bombs and health. Early levels are very easy, but the puzzles ramp up around level ten and then you must utilize every possible combo and bonus item in your inventory just to stay alive. Advance a little further and suddenly the zombies are throwing grenades at your barricade and nurse zombies are healing the deaders you just put hard-earned bullets into. There's no denying that shoe-horning rotters into casual games is about as mainstream as it gets, but *Catastrophic*



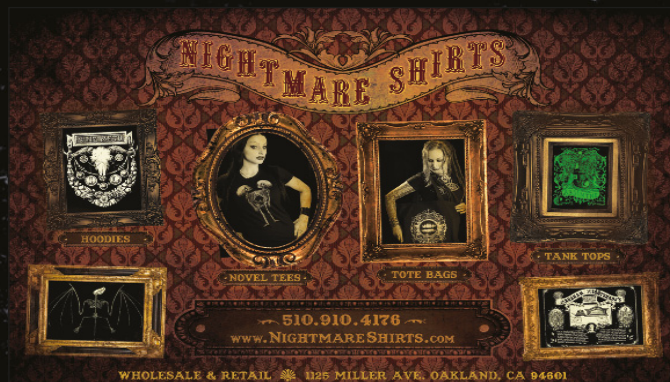
Zombies! is still fun and challenging enough to make it a good bus-stop time killer, at least until the dead weasel their way into a *Fruit Ninja*-style game.

BRENTON BENTZ



HEADSHOTS: SOLID PUZZLER, THE EXPLODING ZOMBIE KILLS ARE VERY SATISFYING

MISFIRES: FREE VERSION HAS AN ADVERTISING BAR RIGHT WHERE THE ZOMBIES ADVANCE



CLASSIC CUT

TALES OF MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION: EDGAR ALLAN POE

THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT ☠ UK - 1976

When one contemplates the phrase “horror music,” a few select styles immediately come to mind: Goblin and John Carpenter’s throbbing synthscapes; the Crimson Ghost grinning sardonically down upon his devil-locked Misfit progeny; and Cannibal Corpse and Carcass churning out odes to human anatomy and its disassembly.

Less likely to spring to mind is The Alan Parsons Project. You might know them from such AM radio staples as “Don’t Answer Me” and “Eye in the Sky”; a few may even recall that most of their early albums revolved around particular concepts, such as the ’70s pyramid-power fad (*Pyramid*) or the science fiction-themed *Robot*. However, the initial partnership of Parsons – already well-known as the engineer on such classics as The Beatles’ *Abbey Road* and Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* – and co-conspirator Eric Woolfson was an attempt to bring musical life to the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe.

The group’s first record, the somewhat ponderously titled 1976 album *Tales of Mystery and Imagination: Edgar Allan Poe*, is one of the more unusual entries in the annals of horror music, both because of its radio-friendly commercial pop and because it actually reached the Top 40 in *Billboard* magazine’s Pop Albums and Pop Singles charts (the latter with “(The System of) Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether”).

Ironically, given Poe’s mania for the twin subjects of lost love resurrected and premature burial, the music on offer is surprisingly diverse for a pop-rock album. Most compositions were co-written by Parsons and Woolfson, backed by Ambrosia, a group that had a string of hits in the late ’70s, and cover such varied terrain as easy listening (“To One in Paradise”), an eerie vocorder-voiced dirge (“The Raven”), Broadway-style overlapping vocal melodies (“The Cask of Amontillado”) and full-on shock rock (“The Tell-Tale Heart”). The latter, which wouldn’t sound out of place on one of the early-’70s Alice Cooper albums, features lead vocals by Arthur Brown (RM#184).

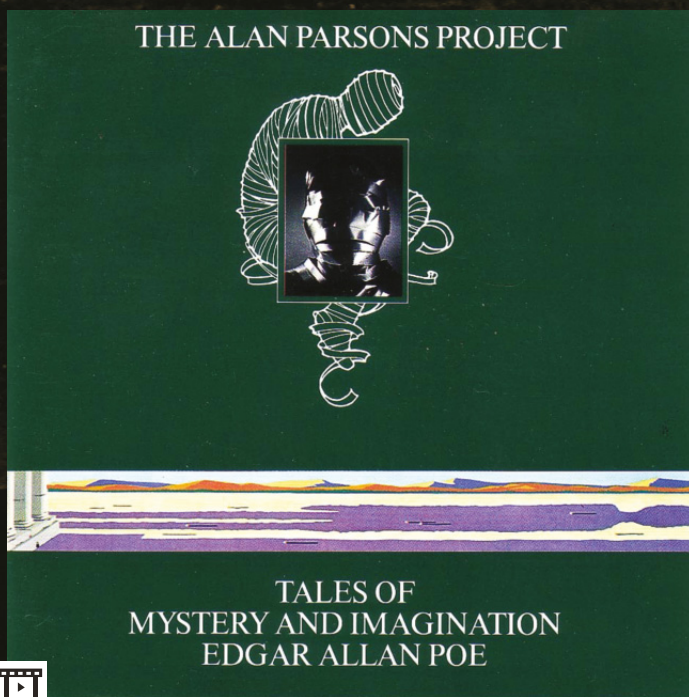
Still, the centrepiece of the album is undoubtedly “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Composed by the Parsons/Woolfson team and pianist Andrew Powell of the London Philharmonic

and BBC Symphony Orchestra, it is much like the house itself: epic, cavernous and built of multiple suites. Running over sixteen minutes in length, it takes up almost all of the LP’s second side and stands on its own as a fine piece of macabre modern classical music (though purists may object to the presence of synthesizers and loops).

Much as Madeline Usher rose from her crypt both recognizable and grimly changed, so too was *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* given new life. Back in 1987, the compact disc was still in its infancy and many of the vinyl releases predating the format had yet to be issued on CD. When *Tales* was first released on the format, Parsons took full advantage of the opportunity, not only completely remixing the album but adding whole sections of music as well. A new guitar solo was added to “The Raven” and a new organ part to “Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether.” One final addition greatly upped the album’s mood and mystique: at what would have been the beginning of each “side” of the disc, narration was added by Orson Welles. Hearing the actor/filmmaker read in his unmistakable baritone from a selection of Poe’s letters and non-fiction works brought a whole new depth to the listening experience. (For those unable to choose between the two versions, Universal Records reissued both as a double disc in 2007, featuring an array of demos, interviews and other bonus tracks.)

Black Sabbath and Alice Cooper may have been winning thousands of young converts at the same time, but they were still seen as dangerous and subversive. Here, decades before *Twilight* and Marilyn Manson flooded the mainstream, was Red Death masked in suburban-friendly AM radio pop your parents could tap their fingers to. Perhaps now overlooked like a purloined letter by tastemakers, *Tales* nevertheless helped keep Poe in the limelight back in the ’70s (and again in the late-’80s), and recontextualized his works for an entirely new audience. Nothing quite like a classic to darken the AM radio dial.

GLENN TILSON



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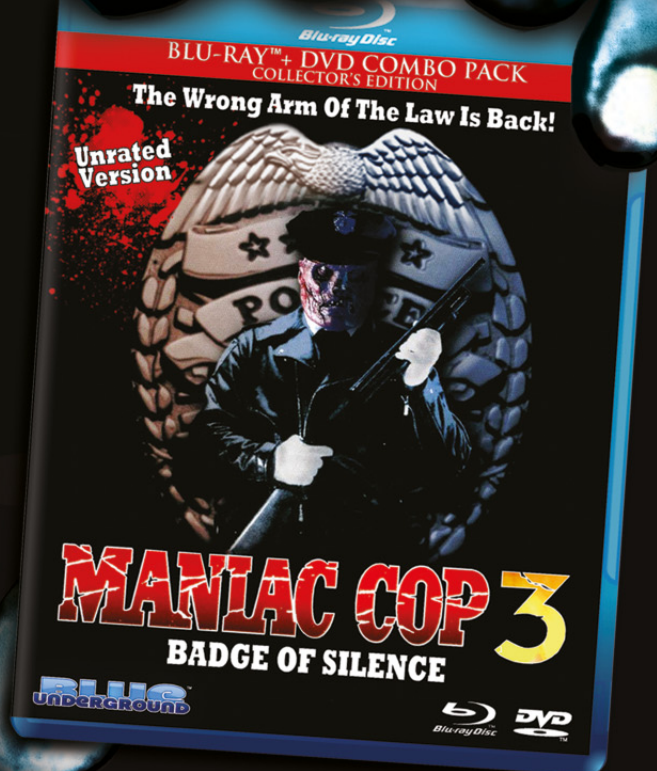
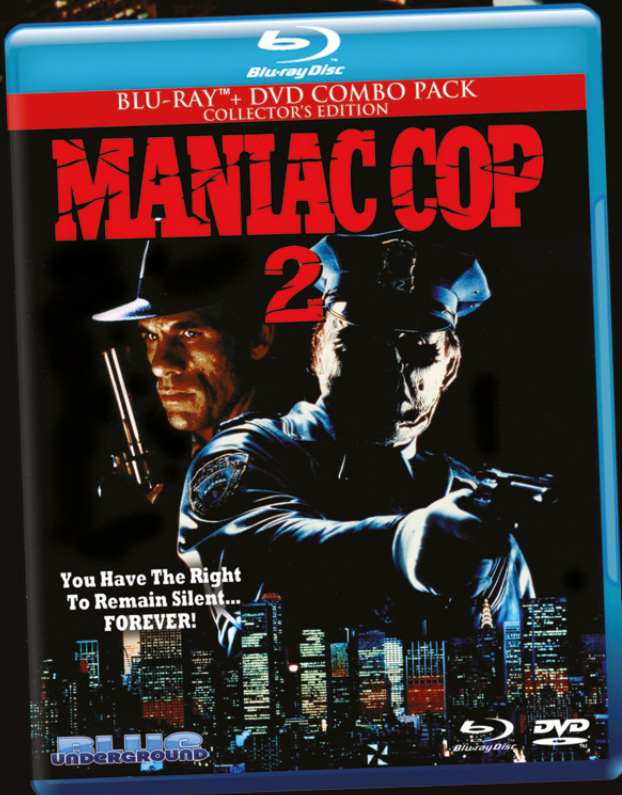


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